

68OHP Bell Wade ATH

Interviewer: Desiree Harguess

Narrator: Wade Bell, 1968 Olympic Games, Athletics (Track/Field 800 meters)

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DH:

Today is January 31st, 2014. This is Desiree Harguess 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 Wade Bell over the phone about his experiences in the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Wade, can you begin with where you were born and where you grew up?

WB:

I was born in Ogden, Utah and grew up there. I'm the second of six boys in my family. My father and mother were blue collar workers.

My dad owned a bakery. Me and my brothers worked in his bakery. I went to elementary, middle school, and high school in Ogden, Utah.

After graduating from high school, I participated in track and ran track in high school mile and a half mile. My senior year in high school, I won the state of Utah mile and a half mile championship first place. I had an invitation to go to the Golden West Invitational in Los Angeles, California to run against the best high school milers in the nation in the year 1963.

I was fortunate enough to get involved with a track and do a race that the runners kind of fell asleep and I won that race, even though I had the slowest time going into the race. Because of winning that race, I had the opportunity and was recruited by numerous colleges to come and run for them. Finally, I was offered a part scholarship to attend the University of Oregon and participate in track and field at the University of Oregon at Eugene, Oregon.

I came to Eugene, Oregon in the fall of 1963 and attended school for four years. I ran cross country for the first two years I was in college and then I ran track in the spring. At that time, only juniors, sophomores, juniors and seniors could run because of NCAA rules.

So as a freshman, I was not able to run on the varsity track and field team at the University of Oregon. In high school, I ran the mile in 4 minutes and 17 seconds. I ran the half mile in 1 minute 55 seconds.

When I came to the University of Oregon to run track and field, there were three runners here faster than I was in the half mile who had run faster times in high school than I had. There were maybe 10 or 12 who had run the mile faster than I had. But I still wanted to come here.

My goal and aspirations were to run the mile under 4 minutes. I felt that coming to the University of Oregon would afford me that best opportunity. I ran track here.

My very first race at the University of Oregon was my sophomore year. The race was held in Berkeley, California. It was a triangle meet between the University of Oregon, San Jose State and Oregon.

I got second in the mile in a time of 4:09 and I won the half mile in a time of 1:52 as I remember correctly. That year was my sophomore year in college. I ultimately ended up qualifying for the NCAA championships which were held in Berkeley, California.

I got fourth in the half mile at the NCAA championships as my sophomore year. The next year was my junior year. I went through school and ran cross country in the fall.

In the spring, I came out and ran the mile and the half mile. On May 6, 1966, I ran the mile under 4 minutes and was third place in the race. I became the 11th runner for the University of Oregon coach Bill Bowerman to run the mile under 4 minutes.

I ultimately ran the half mile in 1:47 and went to the NCAA championships in Bloomington, Indiana. I got third in the mile at the NCAA championships in Indiana. I came back my senior year and ran the mile and the half mile both.

At that time, I was the slowest sub-4 minute miler on the University of Oregon track team. I had David Wilborn who would run the mile in 3:56. Arnie Qualheim would run it in 3:57. Roscoe Devine would run it in 3:58 and I would run it in 3:59. When I ran the mile in the dual meets, I ran it just to get points. I ran the half mile and no one was able to beat me in the half mile.

I went to the NCAA championships held in Provo, Utah and won the half mile in 1:47. From there, a week later, I went to the national USA track and field championships in Bakersfield, California and won the national championships there. I went on to run in a dual meet, a Russian Commonwealth meet and ran the half mile in 1:45.1 seconds. Then, I prepared for the Olympic Games.

That gives you a little background of me.

DH:

Yeah. That's amazing. Wade, who were some of your sports heroes or role models growing up and as you were getting into the sport?

WB:

I would say probably the first and foremost was a guy by the name of Charles Hislop. And Charles Hislop actually went to the same high school I did, then he went off to Utah State and ultimately became a middle school history teacher. But while he was in high school, he actually worked for my dad in my dad's bakery. That's how I got to originally know him.

He graduated from Utah State and taught history. He started coaching me as a sophomore in high school before he was even a track coach. He just did it on the side.

When I became a junior in high school, he became a high school track coach. He had developed some films that he had taken on techniques of running and strategy and whatnot. That's why I say he was probably my first.

The second one that really inspired me to think about Olympic Games was Herb Elliott when I saw him win the 1960 Olympic Games 1500 meters in Rome, Italy. The third one would probably be Daryl Burleson who I saw a picture of and I still got it when he ran a sub-four minute mile in the Oregon-Stanford dual meet in 1962. I'd say those three were probably the people who were most influential for me as far as idols that I thought after.

DH:

Did you also have many friends who were involved in track?

WB:

Track is an interesting sport that you have friends, but track is kind of a lonely sport. It's kind of a one-man sport. What I mean by that is that there are a lot of days I go out and run by myself.

I didn't run with a lot of people. I had people who ran track that I knew and I was friends with. When I was in high school, I did run around with other track team members or cross-country team members.

When I got to college, all my roommates, my freshman year I had a roommate who was a 400-meter runner, but after one year he stopped because he was going to medical school. Then I just had another four or five friends or six friends in college that I did a lot of things with, but none of them were track people. They all ended up in medical school and I was the only one that stayed in athletics.

I enjoyed their company and we had a good time, did a lot of good things together.

DH:

What initially attracted you to the sport and then what drove you to excel to the elite levels of the sport?

WB:

I think the first thing, I remember being in the ninth grade in a math class with a Dan Thomas who was a math teacher who was training as a paratrooper. He was a paratrooper in the National Guard. In the spring, he had to go out and run.

I remember going out and running with him as he tried to get fit enough to go to paratroop school. That kind of got me involved with it. That year, after running with him a little bit, I went to Ogden City Junior High School track meet and I ran the half mile there and I won it.

I kind of liked running it. I didn't do much after that particular race until about three or four months later when Charles Hislop actually came and got me out of bed at six o'clock in the morning and had me run with a man by the name of Brent Miller and Dean Loffus and Louis Scott, Louis Mickelson. We trained together.

Those guys were seniors. I was going to be a sophomore at the high school and we trained together and did a lot of things. I just kind of enjoyed it and I had successes at it, so I just stayed with it.

Then in 1960, when I saw Herb Elliott win the 1,500 meters, I remember sitting with my high school coach and a couple of my teammates and after Herb Elliott won that 1,500 meters, I

remember Chick Hislop saying to me, Wade, you've got the talent that someday you could be there if you wanted to be. That kind of planted the seed for me. Then I thought about it and realized that in 1956, the sub-four minute mile had been broken and here it was in 1960 and I thought someday I'd like to run the mile in four minutes.

Then in 1966, almost ten years after it was first broken, I had the opportunity to run it in under four minutes. I just found that to be kind of exciting.

DH:

Absolutely. Can you describe the 1968 trials and where they were and what was your experience there?

WB:

At that time, as my recollection, they had three branches of track and field. What I mean by that is they had the open TAC meet or AAU meet and if you finished in the top three places of the AAU meet or in the top three places of the NCAA meet or in the top three places of the all-service meets, plus if you had a particular standard time, you could get in the first Olympic trials. They had two Olympic trials that year.

The first Olympic trial was held in Los Angeles Coliseum. They originally told us prior to that meet, in a meeting prior to that meet, they said anybody who wins first place in the first trials is automatically guaranteed a seat on the Olympic team. But they also said we're going to have a second Olympic trial.

It's going to take place and finish up one month before the Olympic Games in Mexico. Now to give you a little history about this is in 1964, we had an Olympic trials held at Randall's Island, New York. In a three-day period, we selected an Olympic team to go to Tokyo, Japan.

Then they had about a two and a half month wait before they went to Tokyo. So they selected their team and in two and a half months, they waited before they went to Tokyo to compete. When the United States track team went to Tokyo, they did not compete very well.

A lot of people were quite disappointed over their performance. So after the 1964 Tokyo Games, the United States track and field Olympic Committee and other people got together and said, what are we going to do to have a better representation in track and field Olympic Games? At that point in time, as my understanding, they came and landed upon what they felt was probably the most successful coach to prepare teams and they decided to engage Bill Bowerman, the track coach at the University of Oregon, to help prepare the Olympic team for the Mexico Olympics.

He went about finding out all he could about Mexico City. He found the time schedule, the altitude, the humidity, the time of day, everything. His feelings were that if you're going to run in Olympic Games on a ten-day schedule, the trials ought to be on a ten-day schedule.

If you're going to run in the morning, you ought to run in the morning. If you're going to run when it's hot, you ought to better run when it's hot. If it's going to be cold.

So his thoughts were that the best preparation we could do is run our Olympic athletes through a simulated Olympic Games venue time schedule event. So the thoughts were, all those who were qualified for the Olympic trials competed in Los Angeles. Then we went to South Lake Tahoe and we were up there for a month and a half or two months training, living at high altitude training.

Then they had the trials up there, the second trials up there. Just the night before the second trials, a great big meeting of all the athletes. A lot of discussion about this matter of the guy who finished first in the first trials, is he really going to be guaranteed a seat on the Olympic team, even if he finishes last in his race at this meet?

Finally, they decided that, hey, it was just like a second trials. Whoever first top three runners in each event or finishers in each event would go to the Olympic Games. So we ran there and had a great meet.

I qualified. I think I finished second in the trials and qualified for the Olympic Games. It was run on the same schedule.

What I mean by that is, when you go to the Olympic Games, you have 800 meters, one each day for three days. You have two trials and a final. You have a semi, a trial, a semi, and a final.

That's what you did in the 1500. You did it in the 10,000 or the 5,000 or 3,000. You had preparatory races.

That's what they did at the trials. It worked out very well, I thought. We selected our team and went to Mexico.

The trials were very interesting for me. I enjoyed being at South Lake Tahoe. I was up there all summer training and working.

When I say working, I was kind of like a security guard at the track because they put a nice track in. In the evenings, we could go down to the casinos and have dinner and enjoy ourselves there. There were many athletes there that were married with families.

I spent time, a lot of time, I would babysit athletes' children while them and their spouse went out to dinner or whatever. I'd babysit their kids because I didn't have anything else to do in the evening other than read. I enjoyed that.

It was fun. It was a good experience.

DH:

What was the reaction of your family and friends to finding out that you'd made the Olympic team?

WB:

I think my friends in Eugene anticipated that I would. I had been running well. I had not been beaten in the half mile since 1967. I competed and ran the half mile in 1:45 and had won the Pan American Games. I had not lost many races. I did get injured at the end of the season, so I laid off, came out in the spring. The spring of 1968, I had a number of close

aces that I got beat, but the reason I got beat, I think, is because I was running the first part of it too slow.

Once we picked up the pace and started running 1:46, 1:47 pace, very few people stayed with me. It was kind of anticipated I'd make the Olympic team. My family, I think, were all excited that I'd made the Olympic team.

They had kind of followed my career and they thought it was quite an opportunity to be able to go and represent our country in the Olympic Games.

DH:

As you were preparing in Lake Tahoe, did you remember hearing anything about an Olympic project for human rights?

WB:

Yes, I do remember it through the spring and the summer of the trials. I do remember Mr. Scott and Mr. Edwards involved with some discussion with athletes regarding the issues that were facing the black athletes. I say discussions.

I shouldn't say it that way because I cannot say that I remember being in specific discussions with people, but I had heard talk about it. I thought that they were asking, some people were asking those black athletes to make a commitment that was really a sizable commitment to boycott the Olympic Games. I thought that was a sizable commitment.

After years and days and hours of training, to forfeit that opportunity was really an interesting request.

DH:

Had you heard anything about the student protests and violence in Mexico City about ten days before the start of the Games?

WB:

Oh yeah, I'd heard about that. Matter of fact, I remember going to Mexico and seeing the signs of it. Went down by some of the places where some of that violence protests had taken place and worried about it a little bit.

Wondered about my own safety. I was concerned about it. Didn't know what to do about it, but I think that I was reassured by the Olympic Committee and others that we would be protected and be safe and that we shouldn't try to get involved with it.

We ought to stay away from it. Let that issue be taken up by whoever is conscientious about it rather than us and try to focus on why we were there or why we were going there.

DH:

When you first arrived in Mexico City for the Games, what were your impressions of the city and the people?

WB:

I have to tell you, I was surprised because when you drove down the street, you saw houses, these little mud shacks on streets that were painted bright colors. It looked like to me that

they'd done a lot to try to prepare their communities. I don't want to use the word ghettos, but to prepare their community to be presented in a good light.

As you went down the freeways, you saw big art structures, different of them. There were a lot of light displays. I remember that I took a lot of photographs of light displays they had in Mexico City, colored lights that had different things.

I took photographs of these art structures that they had put up in the islands of the roads. I took pictures of houses where you could look down the street. Maybe the street was a dirt-covered street, but they'd come out and they'd painted the houses.

Maybe they were stucco or mud or whatever, but they were painted and they tried to make them look nice. I thought it was very picturesque. I was kind of impressed with it.

DH:

What did you think of the security at the Games?

WB:

The security at any Olympic Games is questionable in my mind. They have a real challenge. I say that because in 1972, I went to the Olympic Games as a spectator.

The day that the Arabs took control of the Israeli compound, me and my wife walked in and out of the Olympic Village with phony ID and they even handled it, but did not question us. I mean, I had a piece of ID that had an oriental picture on it. My wife had a piece of ID that she'd made off a piece of cardboard.

The guards physically handled the stuff and they let us go on in. So when we go back to Mexico, it didn't seem like to me that if there was security. I didn't really notice much.

I know that they kind of marched us around and controlled us as athletes, which you have to do in a track meet because I now officiate track meets. In order to get people on the starting line at the right time and the right position, you have to kind of marshal them along, but all that stuff I looked at as just being part of conducting the meet, not part of security. Now, they may have had guards and other around, which I'm sure they did, and I do remember seeing them from time to time, but I don't think that it was overly, overly stressed or that their presence in any way made us feel more or less secure.

DH:

What did you think of your accommodations in the Olympic Village?

WB:

They were adequate. What I mean by that is I remember correctly, you were in a big high-rise apartment type thing that was more bricks and mortar, basically. As I remember correctly, the beds were just kind of like cots.

It wasn't like being in a hotel room at the University of Oregon or a hotel room in the United States. It wasn't like that. It was more of a Spartan environment, I guess I would say.

It wasn't like they had pictures on the wall or they had good, great bed coverings or that kind of stuff. As I remember correctly, they had bottled water outside your room, but it wasn't on a stand. It was sitting on the floor.

The doors would close just like any place else. It was adequate. When you're an athlete, you don't expect much.

In those days, there wasn't a lot, so you didn't expect a lot. There were, as I remember correctly, two athletes to a room and maybe four or six athletes to an apartment. It had a bathroom and whatever.

DH:

What do you remember about the food?

WB:

As I remember correctly, they had some large dining halls, probably four or five large dining halls that served different kinds of food. You'd walk down to the commissary or down to where these dining halls were and they had big buffets in there. I've got a rather sensitive digestive system anyway.

What I mean by that is in all the years I competed for the University of Oregon, whenever I went to Berkeley, California and drank the water, I'd get diarrhea. Whenever I went to New York and drank the water there, I'd get diarrhea. Most anyplace else, I didn't have any problem.

I was quite concerned about it when I got to Mexico. I was told that a Seattle company was going to cater the meals for the American team. When I got down there, I found out the Mexican government and the promoters of New Mexico were offended by that, so they had the people there provide food anyway.

Long story short, I got diarrhea as soon as I got there. I lost about seven pounds in three days. We arrived on a Wednesday and I was supposed to run on the following Saturday.

I'd lost seven pounds during that period of time. Being as fit and thin as you are, you can't lose that kind of weight and still keep your strength. Therefore, I didn't perform as well as I would have liked to.

The food was adequate. I mean, what I mean by that, it was foodies. I remember I'd get bacon and eggs and fruit and yogurt and steaks is my recollection.

Basically, the same kind of stuff we'd had at Tahoe. At Tahoe, they fed us very well, but they had a catering service. The food was always cooked well.

They had bottled water, purified water. Therefore, I never had any problem with it there.

DH:

Was your family able to come down to Mexico City to watch you compete?

WB:

No. My family were not well off. They didn't have very much money.

Therefore, in all honesty, I don't think any member of my family saw me compete at the University of Oregon. They were able to travel up to Eugene, Oregon to see me compete. I think the first time that they ever witnessed me run in person was when I won the NCAA Championships at Provo, Utah in 1967.

They were not in a position to do that. Then, a year later, they saw me when my mother and dad were able to come to Los Angeles and see me run in the British Commonwealth meet when I ran 1:45.1.

And so they did not get to see me, but I had, every time there was an article in the paper, in the Eugene paper or the school paper, I sent a copy of them to them. I tried to keep my mother and father posted on all that stuff.

And it turns out that when my mother, she's now deceased, but before she passed away, she gave me all those clippings back. She had them all in boxes. And she had shared them with everybody in her church, in her community, you know, Ogden about it, my brothers.

So my family didn't really get a first-hand view of my feats as a student athlete.

DH:

How were you able to afford to have everything you needed as an athlete? Was that through your scholarship at Oregon?

WB:

It's interesting you say that. Having five brothers, my folks couldn't afford to send me any money. They weren't able to send me any money.

Once a month, my mother would send me a box about 8 or 10 inches high, 12 inches by 12 inches full of cookies out of my dad's bakery. I'd get that once a month. Basically, what I did is Bill Bowerman had an arrangement with a lumber mill here in town, and I would go out and work night shift or graveyard and be a watchman on three eight-hour shifts each weekend in order to come up with enough money to pay my balance, my tuition, and my boarding room.

My senior year in college, I applied for and was able to be a counselor in a dormitory, which took care of my boarding room and paid me something like \$50 a month, which helped with my incidentals. Then I did a little bit of shift work at the mill so I could pay the balance of my tuition in order to go through school. I didn't want to borrow any money, and so therefore I worked hard not to borrow any money.

DH:

Did you ever feel that it was hard to balance everything, schoolwork and track?

WB:

I never found it to be a challenge until I stopped going to school. What I mean by that is I competed in the Olympic Games. I went back to Ogden.

At that time, the Olympic Games were in October. I went back to Ogden until January and tried to get healthy. It wasn't until the following spring sometime when I finally got over the dysentery I got in Mexico.

When I got back to Eugene, I decided I wanted to get back in school because I graduated with a degree in physical education and I didn't want to be a track coach. I said, I don't want to be a track coach, so I went back to school. I originally wanted to get in the MBA program, but at the University of Oregon, the MBA program did not start until September, and so therefore I'd have to wait six months, nine months.

I didn't want to do that, so I started taking accounting classes. I took 12 hours of accounting classes in the winter term and the spring term. Then I took accounting classes again for the next whole year, three terms, 12 hours a term of accounting classes.

Again, I was working and going to school. When I graduated with accounting, I finished up. When I came back at that time, I decided in June of 69, I got married to my wife.

She was a hygienist and she supported me while I finished up my last year in college. I ran in 69 and competed and didn't have any problem with that. After I graduated, I got a job as an accountant.

I wanted to become certified and become a CPA. It turns out the firms that hired me were excited about hiring me, paid me good wages, and told me they wanted me to run. The problem is they wanted me to come to work at eight, get off at five, and run after that.

After five o'clock in Oregon, it's dark. I tried that for a year and found out that there's no indoor tracks in Eugene, Oregon. I found out that in the spring of 70, when I was getting ready to go to the national championships in Florida, I said, hey, I'm just not fit enough to go.

I'd go down there and not represent me well, waste my money. I said, it's time for me to retire. I retired and said that's the end of my career in track and field, running.

Since then, I've officiated and helped out. I found it to be a real squeeze. It wasn't until 72 or almost 76 before they started making accommodations for athletes, letting them only work half a day or sometime like that.

The accounting firm I was working for wanted me to work eight hours a day and then run after, and I couldn't do it. There was no reason to fool anybody except the fact that you can't do it. My parents, again, weren't wealthy, so therefore I didn't have any money.

There's no way they could support me. There were a number of athletes who went into the military because the military would allow them to do that.

DH:

I've talked to quite a few.

WB:

But I wasn't one of those that chose to go that route, because at that time, they'd be at the home board, whatever else was going on. I said, I don't want to take that chance.

DH:

What are your strongest memories of the opening ceremony?

WB:

My strongest memories are, number one, is I did not attend them. The reason I didn't is because the next day is when I ran. The opening ceremonies were one day, and the next day you had to go out and compete.

I talked it over with my coaches and said, hey, you can go out there and stand around for hours in the stadium and enjoy the atmosphere and whatever else, but you're going to have to compete tomorrow. You'll beat your legs and be dead. I watched the opening ceremonies on TV.

In some ways, I regret it. In some ways, I don't, because I don't know how I would have done if I had gone to the opening ceremonies. You've got to remember that the opening ceremony is a long process.

You've got to walk in, and you can't leave because you're tied down. Therefore, you're exposed to the sun for hours, standing on your feet. If you're going to compete the next day, that doesn't leave for a good situation, I don't think.

I remember watching them, and I remember talking to people about them and thought, gosh, it was great, but I did not participate in them.

DH:

Tell me about your closest friends on the team.

WB:

Closest friend I had on the team was a guy by the name of Ron Whitney in the 400m hurdles, a guy by the name of Neil Steinhauer, and a guy by the name of Ron Laird, who won the 400m Open in Tokyo. I bummed around with those four guys all summer long in preparation for the trials. We did a lot of things together.

What I mean by that is we went to casinos and watched shows together. We talked together, played cards, whatever. We did a lot of things together.

At the Olympic Games, after competing, because I competed the first three days, and then you had another seven days, we would go to the stadium, and like I say, security was lax. We could sit down at any place we wanted to. We'd just wander in, go down, sit down, and watch.

Right in front of the steeplechase, we'd watch that, or we'd go down by the 100m and sit down there, or walk around and watch them throw the hammer, whatever. We never had people come and ask us to move. They wouldn't even bother us.

We had a little code between the three of us, or four of us, that if we went out and said, hey, I'm going down by the steeplechase, and we had a little code, and if we were looking for somebody, we'd whistle this code, and the next thing you know, we'd find each other.

We could always kind of find each other in the stadium by this little code we'd developed. That made it so that we kind of bummed around together.

We had a lot of fun together.

DH:
Cool.

WB:
Doing sightseeing and whatever, you know?

DH:
Yeah. So, did you go to any places?

WB:
Yeah, I did. Matter of fact, it turns out that my father gave me some great advice when I went off to college. He told me that, he said, wait, don't waste your time in a hotel room.

And I took that literally. I've been back to New York during my running career. I went to New York, I don't know how many times, five or six times.

And each time I went back there, one time I went back there and I walked to the top of the Statue of Liberty before they closed it. I remember walking to the top of it. I went to Central Park one time.

I went to a Broadway play another time. I ran an old and a new Madison Square Gardens. I went down to Times Square.

I took my dad's advice and said, when I go someplace, I don't waste time sitting in a hotel waiting for the track meet to occur. Same thing is true in Mexico City. I mean, I visited.

I remember going downtown Mexico where the United States Olympic Committee was meeting and had an interesting experience. I went to basketball. We wanted to go see the United States play basketball.

We couldn't get in. It was tight as a drum. We saw a guy who was working with television, ABC, I think, or some television station.

We asked him about it. And he says, you got tickets? Nope.

And so it turns out, he says, well, come with me. He told the gatekeeper there, hey, these people are with me. They left their ID inside.

And so we got inside and went in and sat down. We were sitting behind the basket watching the United States play. And some guy there said, wait, what are you doing here?

I said, we're just sitting here. You got tickets? I said, no, we don't have any tickets.

He said, come and see me tomorrow. So the next day I went downtown to the United States track and field, the United States Olympic Committee headquarters and found this guy. And

I remember him taking me to the second floor of this hotel room, in this hotel, in a conference room.

The conference room had a huge table on it, and it had stacks of tickets to venues.

DH:

Oh, wow.

WB:

These are the complimentary tickets for Olympic officials. I said, oh, they are, yeah? I said, oh, that's great.

So he gave me four tickets, and I went and saw soccer, fencing, basketball, equestrian. I don't know, there were about four or five or six events, he says. I said, well, here, here, we got extra, extra of these.

Nobody seems to go in there. We'll give you a couple of these. He gave me tickets to go see a number of venues, which, you know, it turns out, my future wife, at that time we were married, my wife had flown down there.

At that time she was my girlfriend, she'd flown down there. So she and myself went to a number of those things with Ron Whitney, and we went out and visited a number of venues and enjoyed other sites, other events. We went down and saw where they did the canoes, the kayak, the, not kayak, what do they call those long, the rowing competition.

We went and saw a lot of different, we saw, like I say, six or eight different venues. Because we'd usually go to something like that in the morning, then go to the track and field stadium for the afternoon or evening.

DH:

Yeah.

WB:

So we got to enjoy that. We, I remember taking a tour of, there's a big Catholic cathedral there, we went and took a tour of that. We took care of several other things.

I found the people in Mexico to be very, very friendly. I remember one, one evening, it was night, one night. When we got down there, they gave us a handful of USA pins, their little pins look like a badge type thing.

Give us a handful of those. And one day I left my room and went down to the front gate of the stadium, the Olympic Village, and there was a big bus terminal there. And I walked outside the terminal, and I was walking, just taking a little walk, just close to the stadium, to the compound there.

And a little boy came up to me and said, pin, pin, pin, and he wanted one of my pins. And so I gave him a pin, and in return he gave me a coin. And I put the coin in my pocket, thinking nothing of it, and a couple days later I found that coin.

And that coin was an 1859 half nickel, U.S. Oh, wow! 1859 U.S. half nickel, called a half nickel. It was about the size of a dime.

And I still have that in memory of that. I remember walking down the streets and seeing children or young people selling chicklets, little tiny square boxes. They called them chicklets, square boxes with two pieces of gum in them.

Selling those. I remember walking down the streets, on the side streets, and stopping in front of a butcher who had a stall that was concrete floor and walls with chickens stacked two or three feet high in the back of it. People just came along, picked up a chicken, they weighed it and took it home.

All of them were plucked, but the head, feet, and legs were on them with no feathers. And they were just laying there on the concrete floor. People would pick them up and take them home and cook them.

DH:
Hmm.

WB:
Another evening there was going to be a banquet for the athletes, and it was someplace across town, and somehow me and Ron and a couple people got separated from our people. And we didn't know how we were going to get there. And finally a small car with a bunch of students pulled up, and somehow we were able to communicate to them where we wanted to go.

And they jumped us in this car, we were hanging out the windows. They drove us clear across, about an hour across town. Took us to where it was, got out, said thank you, appreciated.

They were very friendly and helpful people. I mean they were great. We enjoyed their company and we thought they treated us very hospitably.

DH:
Wonderful.

WB:
Many times. Many times.

DH:
It sounds like you had a wonderful time there.

WB:
When I came home, because I had not done well in the Olympic Games, I came home depressed. And I often times referred to leaving my life in Mexico. And I say that because if I had been able to compete like I should have been, I felt I was favored to win the gold medal.

And I didn't, didn't even get a medal. And so I was quite depressed over it. But as time has gone on and memories fade, I feel it was a good experience.

Track and field was good for me, good to me. I never regretted being involved in track and field, but it just didn't end up as positive as I would have liked it to. But yeah, I had a good time.

And let's see, a number of the athletes were going down to Acapulco. I thought about going down there. I didn't.

I went to some ruins, some pyramids outside of Mexico. And took a tour, took a day's tour of them on a day off that there was no competition. Again, following the advice of my dad is not to sit in a hotel room.

So I went out and climbed some pyramids and saw these. I can't remember exactly all the description, but I remember going out and looking at those and seeing those kind of things.

DH:

Did you have any interactions with people from other national teams, especially like Soviet block athletes?

WB:

No, I never had. I never had any interactions or discussions with them. I didn't avoid them, but it just didn't seem like they were that available to have conversations or interactions with.

DH:

What do you remember about drug testing at the 1968 games?

WB:

I remember that after I got done running, I competed. And after I got done running, they immediately grabbed me and marched me into a room. And because I had diarrhea and vomited and whatever, I was dry.

I was there for several hours because I could not give them a urine specimen. I was there for hours. And finally, I still have a little bit of dry heaving.

If I remember correctly, I did take some water in and after several hours, I finally gave them a specimen. And it sticks in my mind because of my situation, it sticks in my mind the U.S. doctors gave me a shot. I can't remember for sure, but I think they gave me a shot.

And told me I ought to get back to the Olympic Village and lay down because it could put me to sleep. When I finally left the drug testing center, as I remember correctly, it was dark and I started walking. I walked back.

It was something like seven or eight miles. I walked back to the Olympic Village that night. And walked around all night.

If I remember correctly, I walked all night long. Until about six in the morning. And finally around six in the morning or something like that, I had met up with my girlfriend, Marie, my present wife.

And she took me to her apartment and I fell asleep on her bed. And slept for several hours and then went back over to the track meet. The only thing I remember is that they took us in the room and they wanted a specimen.

And I was not feeling that good and I was not that good of a situation and I had a hard time giving them a specimen. That's all I remember.

DH:

Wow. That's interesting.

WB:

I don't remember much of anything else.

DH:

Wow. So, tell me a little bit more about your event. I know it didn't go as well as you had hoped, but any other challenges besides the ones that you've already described?

WB:

Well, you know, when we were training at South Lake Tahoe and Bill Bowerman was there, my coach and everything. We were training at a pace that we felt would be equal to the world record. And my fitness was very good.

When we got to Mexico, it turns out that when we left South Lake Tahoe, we drove over to Reno and flew into Denver. When we left South Lake Tahoe, they said, send everything home. You won't need anything.

So, we sent everything home and then we took a bus to Reno, flew to Denver. When we got to Denver, they put us up in a hotel for three days. We went down to May Company's warehouses and they started you at one end of the warehouse, a whole big long line of tables.

And you set a suit, they put two suitcases on the thing and you push these down these tables and they put stuff in them. They put two pairs of slacks, two pairs of socks, two pairs of shoes, a shaving kit. Then you came to a place where they fit you for a coat and whatever else.

Here's your running shoes, here's your running socks, here's your running outfit. And then you packed it up and went. Then we flew into Mexico City.

And we were able to train during that time. Once we left South Lake Tahoe and we got to Reno, that's one day to Denver. We were able to take a little training in Denver and then we went to Mexico.

When we got to Mexico, they had a training site for us. Each team had its own training site. We went to that training site.

And like I said, we got there on a Wednesday. Shortly thereafter, I knew I had problems. I had diarrhea.

I went to the doctors on a Thursday or Friday and said, hey, I got diarrhea. What are we going to do? And the guy says, well, we can't give you some stuff because it'll show up in a urine test.

So he gave me a Contac pill. Contac pills basically for sinus problems, not for stomach problems. Because they didn't want anything that would show up in your urine.

And so consequently, I never did receive any medication for my sickness. Until two or three days after I competed. It took a while for it to kind of take care of it for me.

And so consequently, I trained. I was on the end of my training. Slowly lightening up in order of preparation.

I remember that we showed up at the stadium. We went to the practice track. We went through around the practice track and warmed up.

Got warmed up. And then they brought you into a place where you sat down on some seats. And the environment in Olympic Games is completely different than it is in a dual track meet or in a national championship or in a meet in the United States anyway.

Because there they brought you in. They sat you down and you had to sit there for about 20 minutes. Now, being highly trained athletes are used to moving around, stretching or whatever else.

But they required you to sit. Just sit. And that's not the easiest thing on muscles.

And I wished I would have had some warning ahead of time. Because if I had known ahead of time, I would have started preparing for that. You know, but I didn't.

And so anyway, you just sit. And not only do you kind of cool off, but you can also kind of tighten up if you're not careful. And then they start moving you towards the stadium and you have to go down a long hallway.

Long tunnel. And then they got a holding area after the first race is done. And then they bring you on the track and they bring you right to the starting line.

And then the gun goes. You don't take strides on the track or anything like that. Well, here in the United States, you know, you go to the starting line, they let you take strides.

They let you do a little warm up. You know, you can kind of move around. But at particular Olympic Games, they didn't allow that.

And presently in the Olympic Games, they don't let you do a lot of that. So that's a little, that's a change in what you're used to doing. And anything that is different that you're not used to doing can change your mindset and make it so you lose a little bit of concentration.

But, you know, it was interesting. The other thing is, is that some of the equipment that they gave us, for example, they gave us running trunks that were made by a well-known manufacturer here in the United States. And the pair they gave me to run in was about three sizes too big.

It wouldn't even stay on my waist. And so therefore, when I went to the Olympic Games, I actually wore my University of Oregon running trunks. Green rather than white because the uniform was white and I didn't have the white uniform on.

There was a great deal of uproar over that because I was out of uniform. Therefore, I should have been disqualified because I was out of uniform. But because I didn't advance to the finals, they just ignored it.

But there was an uproar about that particular situation.

DH:
Really?

WB:
My attire. Because they have some rather strict rules when you get to the Olympic Games that you have to run in the country-provided uniform with no alterations. And you have to be very careful about a number of things like that.

You know, a case in point like Nick Simmons, 800-meter runner now, who got in the last Olympic Games. He went out and got a tattoo on the side of his arm with the idea of advertising. During the Olympic trials, he had to put a piece of tape over it.

DH:
Oh, yes.

WB:
And so consequently, everything is kind of governed and regimented.

DH:
Yeah.

WB:
So, you know, I kind of not conformed in that way a little bit. But like I say, they didn't really do anything to me because I'm not qualified to go on.

DH:
Yeah, I see. Were you there when Smith and Carlos raised their fists on the medal stand?

WB:
I believe that I was in the stadium, but I don't believe I was where I could see them very clearly. Because my recollection is that I was on another side of the stadium watching another venue or another event. I didn't watch a lot of the award ceremonies.

You know, every time there's an award ceremony, they play the national anthem and whatever else. And they kind of work it in between events. And I think that I was on the other side of the track watching another event.

I'm trying to remember which one it was. I can't remember right now, but I've seen pictures of it. I've seen films of it.

But I can't say that I remember specifically seeing them do that because I think I was on the other side of the stadium.

DH:

Okay. What do you remember of the fallout in the Olympic Village right afterward?

WB:

Well, you know, it's interesting because right afterwards, there was just a lot of chaos. A lot of chaos. And I should tell you this, that when we got to Mexico, the black athletes caucused about what they were finally going to do.

And they specifically said, hey, we don't want you white athletes involved. This is an issue that we need to handle. And so we were, at least to my knowledge, we were not invited.

I was not invited, even though I had traveled with Tommy Smith and John Carlos. I'd competed in Europe with them. I'd gone to the Pan American Games with them.

They said, hey, Lee Evans, I knew those guys. I knew them. They knew me.

But they said, we think this is something that we have to work with. And so after it was over, after the event occurred, of course, what was coming to us was people coming and saying, well, what do you think of this? Or what's your response to this?

And my response was, you know, I think you ought to talk to them about it. I don't think that's a matter that I want to get involved with. I didn't want to be quoted or shown on TV or anything else as responding to something because I didn't have all the facts.

And I felt that whatever they decided to do was what they decided to do. And I wasn't going to be for or against it. I realized this was at this point because I don't have enough facts about it.

I think they had an agenda. I think that there were some important issues that we were ignoring here at home and that they needed to be addressed and somehow they weren't. And so, like I said, I just kind of tried to avoid it because I didn't think I was really in a position to do much or say much.

DH:

I see. What do you remember about the closing ceremony?

WB:

Well, if I remember correctly, I didn't march in it, but I went and watched it. I said, you know, I don't know that I want to march in that. And I think I went over and watched the closing ceremony from the stands.

And they were long, you know. And, you know, they were powerful. People running around and people coming to the inside of the stadium, I mean, the infield of the stadium.

And, you know, it was a moving point when they dimmed the lights and retired the Olympic flag. That was a moving moment to me because I'd spent a lot of my life preparing for that

event. And then having the disappointment with it and then seeing it finally come to closure.

And that just kind of put the final dot on it for me.

DH:

What did you do right after you returned home?

WB:

As soon as I returned home, I went back to Ogden. I finally got a job with Thiocol Youth Corps, Job Corps. And I lived at home with my folks for the next two and a half months.

And I worked a night shift at the Job Corps. I enjoyed it. It was fun.

I didn't do any running, didn't do any exercise. I just tried to get myself healthy because I still have diarrhea problems. And basically, I kind of became, let's say, secluded from track and field altogether.

Didn't have any contact with any of my former track mates or my colleagues or anybody. I just kind of withdrew a little bit. And I was probably in some state of depression for a while.

DH:

What sort of, I guess, reflections on amateurism have you had over the years? As amateurism has changed. I mean, you talked a little bit about what it was like to need to support yourself through school and your sport.

But I'm just wondering if you had anything else to add to...

WB:

Well, the thing I did not feel good about was the pure definition of amateurism they had when I was running. Because basically, if you live by that theory or that principle, only the wealthy were able to continue to compete in all sports. And what I mean by that is you had parents or family or somebody who would support you in order that you could train.

And that's kind of what we had with Avery Brundage. He tells himself as a great athlete, he competed in Olympic Games, but he came from a family that was very well off and he never really had to work much. Whereas I came from a family that was very poor, lower-middle class, I would call it.

And they were not able to support me at all. So how was somebody like in my status going to be able to compete in a national or international level without some kind of support? And I felt that that was somewhat unfair, but on the other hand, it was the rules.

And if you want to compete, that's the rules you live with. I believe in living within the rules. And then it turns out, I go back and talk to many people as early as 1960 or 64.

There were some people who were getting paid under the table. They're still getting paid while they competed. And they were able to continue to compete while they were receiving illegal subsidies.

I was offered illegal subsidies. I chose not to have them. I said, that's not part of the rule.

I'm not going to do it. And consequently, I didn't get involved with that aspect of it. But there are people that did because that was the way they were going to either benefit from or do it.

I competed in athletics and track and field because I loved the activity and the sport. I never entered it with the idea of having monetary gain. And I still never felt like I wanted to be monetarily rewarded for my performances.

And that doesn't mean somebody else has to believe that, but that's what I believed. And I felt strongly that, hey, I went into it because I love the sport. I loved the opportunity to go out and train hard and show that I had mind over matter.

That I could physically push my body to the point of exhaustion. I enjoyed being able to accomplish certain things physically and took great pride and joy from those. Sure, I enjoyed winning championships.

Sure, I did that. But I got as much or more satisfaction out of just doing for myself that I had accomplished something that maybe somebody else hadn't. Or being the first one to do it or being able to do something that was unusual.

And I thrived on that.

DH:

Yeah, I can see that.

WB:

And so consequently, I look at it now and we've commercialized track and field. And the first question that comes to my mind is, I think Edmund Moses was a great hurdler. Great hurdler, don't get me wrong.

But he hurdled for 10 years. And my question is, during that 10-year period, were there some other athletes come along who didn't get an opportunity to develop because there are only 8 lanes on the track to compete and Edmund Moses got one every time? Therefore, someone else didn't have the opportunity.

So did we lose some other individual who may have blossomed in to be a good runner in the 400-meter hurdles or whatever? But didn't have the opportunity because there were not enough lanes on the track. Or not enough opportunities in a meet.

Because now you've got professional athletes, runners for example, who stay around for, you know, 1, 2, 3, 4 Olympic Games. Now don't get me wrong, don't get me wrong, I think they're good athletes. But I'm wondering about, is there some athletes that say, hey, you know, there's only 3 spots on the Olympic team, why should I work hard and not make one?

Why don't I go into baseball or why don't I do track or why don't I just give up and get on and become a doctor? You understand what I'm saying?

DH:

Yeah, yeah.

WB:

And so I say to myself, you know, I don't know, but I just look at it from a little bit different situation. Because a lot of the people that we've got that are professional athletes, track and field athletes, now it's a little bit different when it comes to other sports, I think. On team sports, because team sports like football or baseball or basketball, you've got a team of people.

So therefore, you've got an opportunity to run people in and out. Okay? And you can take a look at how athletes do.

Track is a little bit different, I think, because when you come to the 100-yard dash, you know, there are only 8 lanes. And if you've got 4 of them are occupied by guys that are 4-time Olympians, granted, they're still running good, there's no question about it, or they're running as well. But are we not giving everybody an opportunity to compete?

Is it becoming an elitist program for only the professional athletes? Which it is. And that's the only part that I get concerned about.

These guys have got to make money, they've got to support themselves. I don't have any problem with that. And I know that.

For example, I helped negotiate a contract with Henry Marsh in 1984. So I know what's going on with those things. And do I look back and say, you know, I should have got paid?

Nope, not one minute. That doesn't enter my mind.

DH:

Okay. What has been the impact of being an Olympian on your life?

WB:

I think it's only secondary. I think there were accomplishments in track and field that were more influential and impacted my life than being an Olympian. I think that being an Olympian is a great honor, you know.

But when you live in a city like I do and you've got maybe 20 or 30 of them, it's not like I'm a novelty. I mean, I can run into Olympians every day. I can run into Olympians every day if I look around.

You understand what I'm saying? Now, if I was back in my old town of Ogden, hey, maybe there's only one other Olympian in the whole town. I don't know.

But in Eugene, Oregon, there are a lot of Olympians. And so, therefore, I don't think that... But being a sub-formant of Miler, now that's a different thing.

I mean, that is a whole different ballgame. I mean, because in this community, and most every place, people recognize a sub-four minute of Miler is quite an efficient, quite a feat. Now, Olympians is too, but a sub-four minute of Miler may be viewed as a little stronger feat.

You understand what I'm saying?

DH:

Sure, it's a very elite club, a very small group of people. That's right, that's right.

WB:

And when you stop and think about it, and I say, I was probably about the 36th, 37th, 38th, somewhere around there, human being to run the mile under four minutes. And about the 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st time it had been run. Nowadays, there are over a thousand people that run it.

And it's been run lots of times, so it's a lot less novelty. But when you go back and look at it over time, that's kind of a really unique situation to be in.

DH:

Yeah, definitely.

WB:

Running the half mile, one minute, 45 seconds. One minute, 45.1 seconds.

DH:

Wow.

WB:

When you stop and think about that, that time would have qualified for the 2008 and 2012 Olympic team.

DH:

That's amazing.

WB:

And I ran it almost 50 years ago.

DH:

Wow.

WB:

You understand what I'm saying?

DH:

Yeah, that's amazing.

WB:

And I ran it on a cinder track, not an all-weather track. So when you start looking at those performances and compare them with today's, those are pretty unique.

DH:

Absolutely.

WB:

That's more rare, more unique than Olympian.

DH:

Yeah, absolutely.

WB:

I'm not saying Olympian isn't important, don't get me wrong. But I'm just saying, in my particular community, in my particular situation, there are some other factors that I think are influential. Now, what's the impact of that?

I think that by my staying in Eugene, Oregon, and pursuing a career as a certified public accountant, I see that topic. Hey, like last night, I went to a ball game last night, University of Oregon basketball game. And a guy came up to me and said, wait, I now recognize you.

And I remember watching you run when you were at the University of Oregon. And you made us proud and did well. Here it is, 45 years later, whatever, 50 years later, he used to come up and say that to me.

He's not saying, boy, it's great you went to the Olympic Games. He's talking about my performances when I ran track here, a mile and a half mile.

DH:

Yeah, that's awesome.

WB:

And so from that standpoint, the carryover, of course, this is a very knowledgeable track community. And I've been very active in the track community. We have a track club here, and I've been president of it.

I officiate track meets here, but I don't work for the university. I'm not associated with the university. Some good advice that Bill Bowerman gave me was, hey, wait, don't get too close to this university athletic department because it's highly political.

Well, I've taken that advice to heart, and I support him and whatever, but I'm not going to be on their track and field or their coach searching committee. I'm not going to be on their fundraising committee. He just, you know, taking his advice, I'm going to step back and enjoy, be supportive, but not involved.

DH:

Yeah, yeah.

WB:

And so, yeah, I'd say, yeah, track and field has been good to me. Yeah, I can look back at it. I think like the meeting I was in this morning, the guy was saying, you're pretty busy right now.

I said, well, I'm more busy right now today with something because I'm trying to juggle, these people want to see me with this interview out of Texas. And the guy says, oh, somebody wants to, some newspaper wants to interview you about your track career? I said, no, not really.

See, so immediately it comes up.

DH:

Yeah, yeah, for sure. That's really cool. Do you currently run for recreation or exercise?

WB:

I have run, when I retired in 1970, I ran three days a week. I basically ran three days a week up until November of this year. And then in November, I hurt my knee somehow.

And so I've kind of gone to cycling now. But I have some, up until November, I was running pretty consistently three days a week.

DH:

Okay.

WB:

About four to five miles. And years ago, when I say years, 10, 12 years ago, I used to do more. And I've been jogging, I've been running or cycling.

I go back and I look and I look at like, I get right here on my desk. I see a pull over a calendar because back in 2000, I decided to take a break from running. And I rode my bicycle 300 miles in seven days.

I rode from the state of Washington border to the state of California border along 101, along the coast on Oregon coast.

DH:

Oh, pretty.

WB:

And so consequently, I've kind of run and jogged all along.

DH:

Yeah.

WB:

When I retired, I quit competing. I refused to do any competing at all. I don't do any competing.

But I still like the exercise part of it. I still like going out and exercising.

DH:

If you had to reflect on the legacy of the 1968 U.S. Olympics, you know, what made that team special at that time or compared to other teams, what would you say that would be?

WB:

I'd say that the biggest specialty about that Olympic team was that the time between the first and second Olympic trials when we were at South Lake Tahoe as a team, we had an opportunity to bond and get to know each other. It's too often that teams, track teams, for

example, know of who runs the 100, know of who's pole vaults, know of who's the javelin throwers, who's the hammer thrower, but they really have no association with them. And let me give you an example.

When we got to South Lake Tahoe and we were training there, it turns out that they assigned a coach from Louisiana to train the 800 meter runners, this guy by the name of Oakers, Johnny Oakers. And Johnny Oakers also was assigned to coach the shot putters. Well, neither the shot putters nor the 800 meter runners wanted him coaching.

So what we did is we worked out between the two of us, shot putters and 800 meter runners, if they had us to work on something really important and they didn't want Oakers around, we would say, Oakers, we need you over here to try to time us on 400 meter runners, running 200 meters, timing races. So those guys wouldn't have him over there. And if we had events we wanted to work on, something we wanted to do, we'd tell them, and they'd get him over there.

So that he never really was there to bother us with other mundane type tasks. Because of that, I got to know the shot putters. I mean, I would have never gotten to know Jay Sylvester, a discus thrower, Al Oerter, a discus thrower, John Powell, a shot putter.

I'd never got to know Bob Beamon, a triple jumper. I never got to know those guys as well as I did, if we had not had that 60 day bonding period down at South Lake Tahoe. And I don't think the teams have that kind of experience to get to know each other as well.

I mean, they know who they are because they've been teammates. But to really sit down across the table and eat dinner with them or sit down and do those kinds of things, you just don't have that opportunity. And I think that was one of the most unique features of the 68 Olympic team.

DH:

Well, absolutely. It must be because another unique feature of the team is that they've kept in touch remarkably well and stay fairly well networked. And it must come from having already kind of had those friendships and associations.

WB:

Oh, yeah. I'm sure it was. I mean, where else would I have gotten to know a triple jumper, a 400 meter hurdler like Ron Whitney?

You know, I mean, that's the farthest thing from an 800 meter runner. Now, granted, I didn't spend a lot of time. I knew Jim Ryan.

I'd had lunch with Jim Ryan or Tommy Farrell or those guys, Winsor Reed or these other guys. But because I competed directly with them, I don't have a lot of, you know, you don't chum around with a guy you're going to try to beat tomorrow. You just don't.

You don't go do things with a guy you're going to beat tomorrow. That's just not the mentality you go into. But you don't have any problem associating with somebody that's not in your events and getting to know them and doing things with them.

You know what I mean? And too many people think outside of track think that, hey, if you run 800 meters, all you 800 meters are great big buddies. That's not true.

That's not true. We basically dislike each other.

DH:

I can see that. Okay.

WB:

We dislike each other. Same thing with 400 meters. I mean, we basically dislike each other.

Not that we want to dislike, but in order to keep the competitive edge hungry.

DH:

Right.

WB:

You understand what I'm saying?

DH:

Yeah, absolutely.

WB:

And not everybody understands that. People think that, well, if you're in the same event, you're in the same event. And like I say, the uniqueness of, I think, of being at South Lake Tahoe was really something for us.

Because I don't think any other team has had that kind of opportunity to spend that much time training and eating together. You know, I think back, I think back of the 100 meters. I remember, I mean, John Carlos.

John's a great guy. He comes up to the Olympic Trials. I go see Johnny.

I see John, Carlos. 2008 Trials. It turns out I got season tickets to the Trials.

My wife and my kids are sitting in them. And my wife tells me, hey, listen, I think Carlos is up near us. I come up to see her.

And he's about two rows up front. And I says, is that Johnny Carlos? And he says, he raises up and says, he doesn't even turn around and look.

He says, is that Wade Bell? You know, it's just a unique relationship.

DH:

Yeah, absolutely.

WB:

That we can call on, you know?

DH:

Yeah.

WB:

And whether it be in the 100 meters or 400 meters or 200 meters or 10,000, whatever it is. You know, it's an association that I don't think, that's a real uniqueness, I think.

DH:

Absolutely. Wade, what one piece of advice would you give to today's Olympic hopefuls?

WB:

What one piece of advice I'd give them? You know, I have to be honest with you. To give advice, I'd have to know the age of the individual.

Because if you were saying, Wade, what advice would you give a kid that's 10 years old? What advice would you give a kid that's 14 years old? What advice would you give someone that's 19 years old?

I'd give each one of them different advice. A 10-year-old, I'd say, you know, if you want to be an Olympian, because I think you're too young to decide on which sport you really want to concentrate on. And on top of that, all sports develop different talents.

Track and field running does not develop eye-hand coordination like basketball does. Track and field doesn't develop foot coordination like soccer does. You understand what I'm saying?

DH:

Yes, yeah, that makes sense.

WB:

And then if I was talking to a 12-year-old kid, I'd say, hey, listen, I'd start looking at those activities that you feel comfortable excelling in and that you can master and do well. Maybe not concentrating yet. Too many people want you to select a sport at the age of 12 and you're going to be a basketball player for the rest of your life.

And I think that's a misfortune. I think that's unfortunate. I got three sons and I made sure that they competed in a different sport and out of that, my daughter became an All-American water polo player four years in a row.

DH:

Oh, wow.

WB:

Out of that, I've got two sons who were pole vaulters at 16'8".

DH:

Wow.

WB:

And I got a third son who played football, but then decided, hey, this wasn't for him, that's fine. But he was great when he was going through high school. He was a big football player, did well.

He had an opportunity to go to college and play football, but he chose not to. But my point being is, they all enjoy sports. Right now, my two sons, the twins, they now are marathoners, distance runners.

DH:

Oh, wow.

WB:

My daughter, she's not involved with much right now, but she goes to exercise. She exercises at a health club. At that point in time, I'm saying, you know, if you're going to the Olympic Games, you've already started narrowing down the sport you're really interested in, and maybe even the event.

Now, the reason I say that is because when I left high school, I always wanted to be a miler. That was my dream. I wanted to be a miler, the best miler I could be.

But realistically, I excelled and became the best in the world and it's a final decision until you see where your performance takes you and the opportunity presents itself.

DH:

Yep.

WB:

And so, therefore, I'd say that. The next thing I'd say is, like I still have my notes. When I was in high school, trying to decide where to go to college, I made a list of the things that were important for me.

I had a list, about nine or ten items. I said, these are important for me. I want to go to college.

I want to be able to look at these and hope I've accomplished them. And then I used that criteria to gauge every school that recruited me and evaluated based on that. Now, there's no doubt about it.

The very first item on my criteria was I wanted to run a sub-4-minute mile. That was the very first thing on my criteria. And I concluded in my own mind that I had a higher chance than any other school that had recruited me.

Why? Because at that time, they were the only college in the nation that had had seven sub-4-minute milers attend that school. No other school had had that many attend.

One or two, but not seven.

DH:

Wow.

WB:

The first time the sub-4-minute mile was run on American soil was by Jim Bailey in Los Angeles Oh, wow.

DH:

What a history.

WB:

And so consequently, Oregon had a history of it. And I'd say the same thing to them. Now, when it came time for my daughter to go to school and play water polo, there is no women's water polo program in the northwestern part of the United States.

And it turns out she finally got offered a scholarship to Slippery Rock. And I said, you know, that's a long ways to go. She said, well, I want to play.

So we went to California and got her involved with the University of Redlands. Small school in Redlands, 1,800 to 2,000 students. And she played there.

Her team won the National Division II NCAA Championship three years in a row. First year she was there, they got second, and the next three years she won it. And I look back and say, hey, you know, that's University of Oregon.

You just don't have the makeup for it. But I would say, a 19-year-old, I'd start selecting where you want to go, what you want to do, and who's best to get you there. Who is probably as important as where.

And I concluded in my own mind that Bill Bowerman, who had coached these seven sub-Florida Milers, was probably the best one to coach me if I wanted to get to that goal.

DH:

Well, that worked out well for you.

WB:

It did.

DH:

Yeah. Well, Wade, is there anything else that you would like to get on the recording before we wrap it up?

WB:

The only thing I'd like to say is, and we didn't talk about it, but you know, after the Olympic Games, I came home and I was depressed. And kind of caught up in my own mire. And then probably 20 years after the Olympic Games, 25 years, I don't know the exact date, I received a telephone call from a guy by the name of Jack Raven.

And Jack Raven called me from Washington, D.C., no, from New York, I think it was, and said, I represent Black Canyon Productions, which is a division of ABC White Roller Sports, and we'd like to do a follow-up on the 1968 Olympic Games and a documentary regarding Tommy Smith and John Carlos. And we understand that while you were in Mexico, you took a lot of photographs and movie cameras. And I said, yes.

And they said, could we see them? As a matter of fact, we'll transfer your Super 8 movies onto a DVD. I said, okay.

So I bundled all that stuff up and sent them to him. It was gone for six or eight months or whatever. And then it came back and a copy of the program that he made.

And the program he made was about the terrible conditions in which Tommy Smith and John Carlos and Lee Evans came back to when they returned to the United States. And I saw that DVD, and I tell you, I was sick. I was depressed.

I just felt terrible. I still feel terrible. To think that those members of my team were going through that kind of harassment, that kind of situation, and I was not aware of it because I was so caught up in my own sorrow that I was not able to reach out and help them in any way.

I just felt terrible about that. Now, my guess is you probably have never seen it.

DH:

No, I have not seen that particular one.

WB:

But it's a very interesting DVD that was put together about how they interviewed Tommy Smith, how he got back. He couldn't find a job. He couldn't find a place.

He worked in a car wash. They made him stay in the back part of it, Lee Evans. And bottom line is it kind of looked like to me that the white community was extremely upset with Carlos and Smith because of what they did.

The black community was extremely upset with Evans because he didn't do the same or he did something different. And I just felt that was surely unjustified. And I just felt terrible about that.

DH:

Yeah.

WB:

And I still feel terrible about it because those guys are great men. They were great athletes. they did.

Sure, they did something, but I don't know that it warranted the punishment they got.

DH:

Yeah.

WB:

And that is always just really grated on me. Now, they've got a more recent one. Somebody did a documentary of Tommy and John going back to Mexico City reliving the experience now 40 years later.

But this one was before that. And it was moving. It was just moving.

DH:

Yeah. I would like to get Tommy.

WB:

Tom has asked me if I'll send it to you. And I said, well, you know, I'll dig it out. I'm sure it's copyrighted, but I'll dig it out because I've got I got a lot of stuff.

You know, I'm kind of a collector of stuff. I think I may even have all the programs from the 60s Olympic Games.

DH:

That would be really cool to see.

WB:

That kind of stuff because I kind of clip, you know, I'm a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is Mormons, which really is in the history. And so consequently, I've always kept a lot of stuff that I thought was historical or stuff that I may need at some time to write my own personal history. In the spring of 1964, they had the AAU Championships in Randall's Island, New York.

I went back there and competed and didn't do well and didn't qualify. And it turns out that I said 64, 68, 1968, 1966, National AAU Championships in 1956. They had them in Randall's Island.

And I didn't qualify for a team, so I went back to Utah. Then I got caught up with a man by the name of Jack Daniels and got part of a study group, High Altitude. And in the spring, it turns out the United States had selected a team to compete against the Russians and the Poles.

The track meet was supposed to be held in Berkeley, California. Because of the political climate, the Russians decided not to come and so therefore they did not show up. And that created a problem because they had a big meet scheduled, international meet scheduled in Berkeley, California.

And so therefore they were trying to put together a substitute meet and I was in Alamosa, Colorado and they called me. And so myself, Tom Von Ruden and Rich Romo, all sub-forminal matters, went to Berkeley, California. And when we got there, and the reason they asked us was because Jim Ryan was there and he wanted to make an attempt on the world record mile run.

And so we, the four of us got together and discussed how we were going to do it and it turns out that Tom Von Ruden was to take the, let's see, Rich Romo was to take the first lap, Tom Von Ruden the second lap, I was to take the third lap and then Jim was to be on his own for the last lap. And we set him up and he ran the mile in 3.53.1 that day, a new world record. But that came about and I competed in that meet because of the Russians' boycott of the meet.

And that created quite a stir within the track community that they decided to bring politics into track and field. But I tried to not get too involved with that because I just wanted to run. But that was the only time I can remember when the political parties involved except

when we got to the 1980 Olympic Games when there was some boycotting that went on there.

But other than that, that's the only thing I can think of that has to do with the political and the unrest and the Cold War.

DH:

Okay.

WB:

So that's all I got to say. I don't have anything to say about that.

DH:

Okay. Well thank you for coming back to that. I appreciate it.