

## Eddie Sutton

With 804 career wins, he has earned a place in Oklahoma college basketball history.

### Chapter 1—1:03

#### Introduction

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**Announcer:** Coach Eddie Sutton, with 36 years of Division I coaching experience, became the first coach to take four schools to the NCAA Tournament. He won 804 career games during stops at Creighton, Arkansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma State and an interim stint at San Francisco before retiring for good. Coach Sutton played basketball at OSU under legendary Coach Henry Iba. In 1959 he became head coach at Tulsa Central High School. His college coaching career began in 1967, when he founded the men's basketball program at the College of Southern Idaho. Eddie is the second-winningest coach in OSU school history, behind only his mentor, Henry Iba. Coach Sutton is a four-time National Coach of the Year. He was inducted into the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame on November 20, 2011. Now, listen to Eddie Sutton talk about his coaching career in this oral history interview brought to you by the sponsors of [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).

### Chapter 2—5:37

#### Eddie's Beginning

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**John Erling:** My name is John Erling. Today's date is September 30, 2010.

**Eddie Sutton:** My name is Eddie Eugene Sutton. I was born on March 12, 1936 in Dodge City, Kansas. I am 74 years old.

**JE:** Where are we recording this interview?

**ES:** We are recording this in the Spirit Bank Building in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**JE:** Tell us about Dodge City. What kind of a community is that?

- ES:** It's an old cow town and farming community. When I was born it was a town of about 15,000 people.
- JE:** By the way, the research says you were born in Bucklin, Kansas.
- ES:** That's wrong. I didn't move to Bucklin until after WWII.
- JE:** Tell us about your mother and where she grew up.
- ES:** My mother was born in a little community called Mullenville, about 35 miles east of Dodge City, approximately 100 miles west of Wichita.
- JE:** What kind of person was she?
- ES:** She was a live wire. Being an only child, I think she probably helped spoil me. My family was of meager means, but once I realized I wanted to play sports, she was always the one that would shag the ball for me when we would play catch. She was a very supportive and a very loving person.
- JE:** Tell us about your father and where he came from.
- ES:** My father's name was Orville Sutton. He was born out in the panhandle of Oklahoma in an old sod house. My grandfather harvested wheat and had a threshing machine. They moved to western Kansas. He eventually ended up in Dodge City and that's where he met my mother.
- JE:** You referred to your grandfather?
- ES:** I never got to know my grandfather that well. He passed away before I was old enough to really remember him very well. He had a threshing machine instead of a combine and he did a little bit of farming out in the panhandle. They lived in a sod home. A lot of people today probably don't know what that is, but that's what they lived in during the late 1800s and the early 1900s.
- JE:** Can you imagine wintertime in Oklahoma in a sod house?
- ES:** No I can't. I think we've gotten spoiled in our present age. I would hate to have lived in those days.
- JE:** Tell us about your father, what did he do for a living?
- ES:** My father was a mechanic by trade, but he was a person that could just do about anything. He was an electrician and a plumber. When WWII broke out in 1941, he worked for a contractor and they built Air Force bases all over Kansas. I lived in a lot of towns in Kansas, Wichita, Winfield, Wellington, Leavenworth and Salina. When the war was over we moved back to Bucklin where I did most of my education as far as elementary, junior high and high school.
- JE:** Looks-wise or personality-wise do you favor your mother or your father in your any way?
- ES:** I probably favor my mother more than my father. He was a wonderful man. He only had an eighth grade education but he could almost do anything and he could build anything. After I left to go to college, he and another person built an entire house in Bucklin. He was

very talented. He did not have a formal education, but he had a big heart and just was a wonderful man. He was just so well liked by the community.

**JE:** Was he supportive of your sports interest?

**ES:** Very much so, yes. He and my mother did everything possible to allow me to spend time in sports. I can remember when we were living on the farm. Any time there was a practice session in baseball or any of the other sports I played, he always made a sacrifice to make sure that I could get there for practice. I did a lot of playing catch by throwing the ball up at the old barn and retrieving it. I did the same thing when I was shooting baskets. My mother, whenever she could when I was small, she would come out and throw the ball back to me. I would have liked a brother or a sister.

**JE:** What was the elementary school you attended?

**ES:** I went to kindergarten in Dodge City. Then my dad started moving around. I went to a lot of different elementary schools as we moved around Kansas from 1941 to 1945.

**JE:** What about junior high?

**ES:** I was in Bucklin from fifth grade through the 12th grade. Bucklin was not a very large town. It had about 600 to 700 people. We lived out of town on a farm. We had about 160 acres that my dad leased. He raised a few cattle and grew some wheat. We only had 60 students in the whole high school. There were 18 in my graduating class, so it was very small. (Laughter)

### Chapter 3—1:43

December 7, 1941

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**John Erling:** Do you have any World War II memories other than the fact that you were affected by it, or your father was, because you moved a lot?

**Eddie Sutton:** The one thing that I remember just like it was yesterday. I was five years old at the time. It was when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Everyone thought it could be the end of the United States. Everybody was frightened. I remember the *Dodge City Globe* newspaper printed an extra addition that afternoon. I will never forget when it came over the radio. I can still see my dad paying the nickel to get that newspaper. The headline read: *Japanese Invade America*. It was a very frightening experience, especially for someone as young as I was. I could tell by looking at my parents' expressions that they were certainly concerned and scared by this event.

**JE:** As you got older during those years to 1945, do you remember anything about rationing?

**ES:** I remember rationing gasoline and sugar and some food products. My parents talked about how all Americans had really rallied to support our country. Certainly a lot of young men and women went to war and lost their lives. There were also a lot of people who didn't go to war, but they still made huge sacrifices working in plants and doing everything possible to help. I can remember President Roosevelt coming on the radio in his fireside chats and my parents listening. He would tell the listeners that they needed to make personal sacrifices. He said even though they weren't in the war they could do things at home that would help us win the war.

## Chapter 4—6:00

### Early Basketball

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**John Erling:** What sports did you play growing up?

**Eddie Sutton:** Back in those days, in elementary school, kids played tag on the playground.

Kids don't do that today. We didn't have video games. In fact, where we lived on the farm, we didn't have indoor electricity or indoor plumbing until I was in the eighth grade. We didn't have TV. We had a transistor radio. That was one thing that hooked me. I started listening to basketball and baseball games on the radio. I pretended in my mind that someday I really wanted to do that. So I think that planted a seed that I wanted to play sports. In junior high they had organized sports teams. When I was in the 7th grade, I was as tall as I am today. I was six feet tall and I was bigger than everybody else. I only grew another inch in high school. We were in a small conference. I was the high scorer in basketball all four years of high school. In junior high, after I had my chores done, I would shoot baskets for two or three hours a day on the dirt by our barn. My dad had put a hoop up there. That's how you become a good basketball shooter. Shooting is an art. Once you shoot the ball the same way every time, it's just a matter of how many hours you put in. You can become a very, very good shooter.

**JE:** You said you listened to the radio when you were young. What teams or schools did you listen to?

**ES:** Everybody supported the St. Louis Cardinals in those days because the Cardinals were the farthest team west. When you lived in Kansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Nebraska and all of those areas, just about everybody listened to Harry Caray and Jack Buck. Four of the great coaches in college basketball were in that area, Mr. Iba at Oklahoma A&M, which later became Oklahoma State, Tex Winter was at Kansas State, Ralph Miller was at

Wichita and Phog Allen at Kansas. All four of those guys are in the Basketball Hall of Fame.

**JE:** Isn't it true that all four of them tried to recruit you to their school?

**ES:** They did try to recruit me my senior year. I can still remember Phog Allen, who was a great coach at Kansas coming out to the house. He had been the Olympic coach in 1952. He came out and my mother made a Sunday dinner. He was there for about four hours. He was a great storyteller and talked about the Olympic games. The only coach that didn't come to my home and recruit me was Mr. Iba and that's where I ended up going to school. Recruiting was a lot different in those days. But the other coaches came out and I visited all of the campuses. I probably would have gone to Kansas if Dr. Allen had been there all four years. Freshmen weren't eligible. He would have only been there one year where I would have been under him as a sophomore because he was retiring. I didn't know Dick Harp who became the head coach. I visited the Kansas campus four weekends in the spring of my senior year and everybody where I lived was a Jawhawk fan. When I visited OSU there was something so special that hit me. I was so impressed with Mr. Iba and how friendly people were. I made the decision and never regretted the fact that I went to OSU. I felt it was the right choice. I have a lot of friends that went to school during those same years. They say that if I would have gone to Kansas that they would have won the national title, because they had the great center Wilt Chamberlain. One thing they didn't have at that Kansas ball club was outside shooting. That's about the only thing I could do. I could shoot the ball from out on the floor.

**JE:** So you could have played with Wilt Chamberlain?

**ES:** Yes. One of the great games in the NCAA Tournament was the year that North Carolina and Kansas went into triple overtime in Kansas City. North Carolina ended up beating them. Kansas didn't have outside shooting. My junior year in college we won one of the greatest games in OSU basketball history when we beat Wilt Chamberlain and Kansas when they were ranked No. 1 in the country. We beat them and it is still considered one of the great victories for the Cowboys.

**JE:** I think it's been referred to as "The Game" at Gallagher Hall at that time, February 21, 1957?

**ES:** Yes.

**JE:** How many points did you score in that game?

**ES:** I scored 18 points. That was one of the best games that I ever had. I hit nine field goals. We didn't have the three-point line then. But had we had the three-point line, I would have had 27 points because they were all beyond the arc as we know it today. I was always quite good at shooting from that range.

**JE:** Let's go back to the gym in Bucklin. The ceiling was quite low?

**ES:** In the junior high gym, it was so low that you couldn't shoot the ball from midcourt or you

would hit the ceiling. When we were just playing for fun, we would shoot billiard shots. We would put different Xs on the floor and the ceiling. If you hit the ceiling in one spot you could bank off the ceiling and it would go in the basket. That was a fun game. But the high school gym was not much larger than the junior high gym.

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**Chapter 5—12:16****Phog Allen & Mr. Iba**

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**John Erling:** Tell us a little bit more about Phog Allen. He coached basketball for 50 seasons. He had a record of 746 wins and 264 losses. He retired with the all-time record for the most coaching wins in college basketball history at the time. He coached Dean Smith, Adolph Rupp and Ralph Miller—all future Hall of Fame coaches?

**Eddie Sutton:** He and Mr. Iba were probably considered the two best coaches in college basketball when I came along. Mr. Iba was a little bit younger than Dr. Allen. I was so impressed with both of them. At the arena in Lawrence, they have a chant now that says “Beware of the Phog!” That means the spirit of Phog Allen is still around. The students chant that sometimes. Allen Field House was built about 1955, about the time I was coming out of high school. I would have played there in that field house. That was one reason they were able to recruit Wilt Chamberlain from Philadelphia, was the fact that it was a new arena and Phog Allen was the coach. Of course, at that time he was the best basketball player probably to have played and certainly the best big player to have played at that time. But, Dr. Allen was just considered a great, great coach.

**JE:** He even coached former Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole?

**ES:** Right. There were a lot of famous players that played for him that went on to become very exceptional in different fields.

**JE:** He also created the National Association of Basketball Coaches, which went on to create the NCAA Tournament?

**ES:** Yes, the National Association of Basketball Coaches started the NCAA Tournament. I think it was in 1938 or somewhere in the late 1930s when they had the first championship game, but Dr. Allen and Mr. Iba and a few other coaches were the ones that started the national championship series.

**JE:** You go on to Oklahoma A&M as it was known at the time, you are a starting guard and you played for Mr. Henry Iba. He retired in the 1969-1970 season. Let’s talk about him. His teams were known for ball control and low scoring.

**ES:** Defense and ball control. In other words, as I have gone through my coaching career, I think defense is the stabilizer of any team sport. Whether it's football, baseball or basketball, if you aren't sound defensively, you're not going to be a consistent winner. But at the offensive end he was very conservative with the basketball. Fundamentally, he was a very sound coach, which anybody that successful is certainly fundamental in what they teach. He was a strong defensive coach. Offensively, he wanted you to take care of the ball with no turnovers. He wanted you to massage the ball and handle the ball until the defense breaks down and they make a mistake and then shoot it. He liked ball control and he was very strong and the fundamentals that he taught. When they talk about the motion offense or the passing game offensively, he was really the one that started that. We've had so many great coaches through the years that have copied that and may have made some adjustments. You can look at Dean Smith and Bob Knight and coaches like that. They certainly have been able to use a lot of those fundamentals that Mr. Iba used and they certainly used a lot of his defensive fundamentals as well.

**JE:** He was known as the Iron Duke of Defense. He was the first to win consecutive NCAA titles in 1945 and 1946. All told in 40 years of coaching, he won 767 games. He was also the athletic director.

**ES:** That's the thing that a lot of people forget. He was not only considered a great coach, but he became an administrator and was the athletic director. He also coached other sports during his career. I think he helped coach football and he coached some baseball. He was very instrumental in bringing Oklahoma State from the Missouri Valley Conference into what was the Big 8. I was a part of that. In 1958, my senior year, we played as an independent. That was a transitional year when OSU left the Missouri Valley Conference and went to the Big 8. It was the Big 7 until Oklahoma State came into the Conference. The Big 8 was a much more prestigious conference than the Missouri Valley. He was the one that really spearheaded that and should have been given the most credit for bringing OSU into the Big 8. It certainly changed the university and elevated it to a higher level nationally by joining the Big 8. In my senior year, we played as an independent. We still played as part of the Missouri Valley Conference, but we went to the NCAA Tournament as an independent. At that time I think there were only 24 teams that went to the NCAA Tournament. We went all the way to the championship game—what they called the Elite 8 Game of the Sweet 16. If we would have beat Kansas State who won the Big 8 that year, we would have gone to the Final Four. They defeated us. The game was played in the Field House. That was the last game I played in. I think Mr. Iba took a team in the late 1960s. Paul Hanson took a team in the early 1980s—1983 I think. And Bill Self, who later was one of my assistant coaches, played on that team. Now he's an outstanding coach at the University of Kansas. That meant that we went in 1958 and Mr. Iba in 1965 I think, Paul

Hanson in 1983—and OSU. So from the time I left OSU until I came back in 1990, they had only been to two NCAA Tournaments. I will never forget Mr. Iba said when I came back, “I’m so happy to have you come back and to know have one of my boys take over the program. I’m going to tell you something. This is not an easy job. It’s a hard job. You’re not going to be able to win like you have at the other schools where you have been.” I said, “I hope we can. If we can get some good players I think we’ll be all right.” I did have some reservations because I wasn’t sure because of the locale if I would be able to recruit as many African-American students, because so many of those youngsters were in cities. I wasn’t sure they could adjust to a community like Stillwater. We were very fortunate and we were able to do that. So from 1990, for the 16 years that I coach there, we took 13 teams to the NCAA Tournament and two teams to the NIT.

**JE:** I’m going to get to that in just a minute. Mr. Iba, first of all the home arena of Gallagher Hall was renamed Gallagher-Iba in 1987. Gallagher was named after Ed Gallagher, the OSU wrestling coach. In your coaching career then, can you sum up what you took from Henry Iba?

**ES:** I certainly drew on a lot of the things that he taught. First of all, fundamentally, he was so sound in everything that he would teach. I borrowed that and as Al Maguire told me once. He said, “You know, there’s nothing wrong with borrowing something from another coach as long as you give him credit.” So I’ve given Mr. Iba a lot of credit through the years for all of the things that he gave to any of us that went into coaching. He was sound fundamentally. He preached defense. He knew that defense was going to win games. He said, “There are nights when you shoot a basketball and ball doesn’t go the basket. There are some nights everything you throw up goes in the hoop. Defense should be the same every night. It shouldn’t vary. Because sometimes the ball bounces around and it doesn’t go in, but defense should be the same every evening.” Well, that’s something that I never forgot. We’ve always tried to make our players understand that defense is the stabilizer of any team sport. The other thing he taught was to take care of the basketball. Don’t be careless with the basketball. Don’t beat yourself. When you make too many turnovers and throw the ball away, you are asking for a defeat. He also taught the value of rebounding. He said, “When you shoot the ball, you condition your players to go to the basket and assume every shot’s going to be missed.” I remember him saying, “Go early. Don’t go late to the backboard.” What he meant was to get in there and get a place under the basket. If the ball comes off at your end of the court then you’ve got a chance to retrieve it. If you don’t, then you can still get back on defense. At the defense end, I can still remember he said, “Everybody’s a defensive rebounder. Limit the other team to one shot every time they cross the midcourt line.” Those are some things that he taught that a lot of other coaches have borrowed from him through the years. There were a lot of successful coaches that came after him, but I think his philosophy of the game was so sound that that

was the reason he was able to win. In later years, when he didn't win, it was because he could not make the transition in the way recruiting changed. When he was coaching, just before I went to OSU, he used to have tryouts. You could bring in all kinds of players to your campus on weekends to work them out. Then you could make a decision on which ones you wanted. At that time there were a lot of players who just came because of his success. They had done away with that rule when I came, but nobody was really recruiting like they do today. Today, you can subscribe to different books that tell you about different players all over the country. You can go to summer camps and watch players. You have summer leagues and you can go and watch players. They didn't have any of that in those days. They did start recruiting about the time that I went to college. Coaches would come to your home and introduce themselves and visit with you and your parents. Mr. Iba never did get into that. I don't know whether he was stubborn or whether he just wanted the players to come to him. I'm not sure he ever got into many home visits, even after I got into high school coaching. I had a player named Joe Smith that went to OSU from Tulsa Central. Mr. Iba never came over to his home to visit with him or anything. I remember he wanted me to bring Joe over to the OSU campus, which I did. He talked to Joe and that was about it. But he just didn't adjust to the way times changed.

**JE:** Maybe it was his personality? Maybe he wasn't a people person?

**ES:** He could be intimidating. He may have not had the personality that other coaches did.

**JE:** Yourself included. You are very outgoing and gregarious and he might not have been that way—is that true?

**ES:** He was a very, very nice person once you got to know him. But he wasn't as gregarious as maybe a lot of other coaches were at that time.

**JE:** He is still honored to this day in many ways. In Gallagher-Iba Arena, a seat on the southeast concourse level of the arena is still known as Mr. Iba's seat.

**ES:** I think his shadow is still cast quite large over the campus of Oklahoma State.

## Chapter 6—5:53

### Coaching Start

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**John Erling:** So your coaching days started as an assistant with OSU in 1958 and 1959?

**Eddie Sutton:** That's right. After I used my eligibility, Patsy still had a year of college. We were going to get married. I went and talked to Mr. Iba. Freshmen weren't eligible in those days. Just sophomores, juniors and seniors were on the varsity team. He knew I was going into

coaching. I said, "My wife has still got one year to get her degree. I would like to get my master's degree. So he kept me on a scholarship and I coached the freshman team and helped with the varsity. I probably learned more about the game of basketball in that one year than I did the other four years I was playing because I could communicate with him in a different manner than I did as a player. Patsy got her degree and I got my master's. I learned a great deal in the one year, then I got the job at Tulsa Central.

**JE:** You mention Patsy, the two of you obviously met at OSU?

**ES:** Yes. That's correct. I had to run hard to catch her.

**JE:** How did you meet her?

**ES:** I met her in my sophomore year. I had a fraternity brother and good friend who was from Stillwater and he knew her. His parents kind of adopted me while I was at OSU. His father was the team physician. He introduced me to Patsy. I had to run hard to catch her. She was the Homecoming Queen at Stillwater High School. There were a lot of other fellows trying to date her, but we started dating and fell in love.

**JE:** Did you get married while you were in school?

**ES:** We got married that summer I worked on my master's degree. That was the year that McClain High School and Nathan Hale High School opened and Tulsa Central—so there were three jobs in basketball open. Myron Roderick was a good friend. He was two years older than I was, but we had classes together at OSU. Myron was a national champion in wrestling. He had also been an Olympic champion. He came over to Tulsa to apply for a coaching position after he graduated. Myron came to Tulsa and applied for the Edison coaching position. He was told that there was a policy that college graduates coming to Tulsa Public Schools don't get head coaching jobs in football, wrestling, basketball or baseball. He was told they would love to have him, but he would be an assistant coach. Myron said, "I can coach wrestling and I really would like to have that Edison job." They said no. So Myron went back to Coach Griffith, the wrestling coach at OSU. He had a medical problem or a heart attack or something and he had to give up his coaching job. Mr. Iba hired Myron as the head coach of the Cowboys. He took Jack Griffith's position. Two years later I came over to Tulsa and I was told the same thing. I was told I would have to be an assistant coach.

**JE:** Because you were just out of college?

**ES:** Yes. I had been in the ROTC and I knew all of the ROTC officers. It was peacetime. They had worked it out so that I could go in as a Lieutenant Officer on a base somewhere and I could coach a team and it will be an easy deal. I was told I could do that for three or four years and travel all over the world. I kind of planned to do that. All of a sudden, I got a call and they offered me a position where I would teach five history classes and you'll be an assistant football coach. I had played football in high school. And, I would be the

basketball coach. They were willing to pay me \$4,250 for nine months. I asked what school and they told me Tulsa Central. I almost fell out of my chair because I would be their head coach at 23 years old. So, I jumped for joy. Patsy got a job at Monroe Junior High teaching Home Economics and we moved to Tulsa. One funny story was that I had never played golf in my life. I didn't know anything about golf or the rules. I had never been on a golf course. When school started, Dr. Black was the principal at Central and he called me over. He said, "How would you like to make \$250 more dollars?" I said, "Golly, that means that I will make \$500 a month! What custodial duties do I have?" He said, "No, you don't have to do that. I want you to be the golf coach." I said, "I don't know anything about golf." He said, "You don't have to teach them, you just be their driver and get them from Tulsa Central to Tulsa Country Club and the two pros at the Club will teach them." What he failed to tell me was that I would have to wait five hours to take them back to school! So that's how I started playing golf because they let me start playing every day with them. I never did win a championship there in basketball, but I did win a golf championship. (Laughter)

**JE:** So in 1959 you were named head basketball coach at Tulsa Central at age 23 and also named the golf coach as well.

## Chapter 7—1:53

### Rupp & Iba

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**John Erling:** Is there a story about a coaching session with Henry Iba and Adolph Rupp of Kentucky at 3 o'clock in the morning?

**Eddie Sutton:** This is a great story. With Mr. Iba, anybody that ever played for him is one of his boys. He considered you part of his family. I think the guys he coached he probably was a little bit closer with and wanted to help them whenever he could. The Final Four was held in the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium more times than anywhere else. It's a small 10,000-seat arena. It could never happen again because the Final Four and the other championship games are played in larger arenas now. Mr. Iba invited me to go. He said, "You get up there and you look me up." I got up there and he got me and we went to some clinics. One night, we had gone to dinner and come back. He invited me to the NABC Board's room. They had a room and a big suite where the coaches would go to have bull sessions and talk afterward. So we got up there and it must have been about 2am. I will never forget Mr. Iba and Mr. Rupp, both of them had had a couple of beers. All of a sudden they had these little 7-ounce Coke bottles and they were down on the floor

on their hands and knees and they were running these plays against each other. Mr. Rupp had a really high shrill voice. I will never forget him saying in this shrill voice, "I gotcha Henry! I gotcha!" And Mr. Iba made a move and he said in his deep voice, "Dang it Adolph, you haven't got me one bit." Those are great times for a youngster. I was probably 26 years old. I still remember those two great coaches down on the floor with those Coke bottles arguing about a certain play that would work and the other saying it wouldn't work.

## Chapter 8—1:56

### Tulsa School Integration

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**John Erling:** To be around those coaches and then have this early coaching job at Tulsa Central. You enjoyed coaching and you set out to make that your career.

**Eddie Sutton:** I did. Even back in high school I was kind of the person that helped the coach. I always felt like that was what I wanted to do, was to be a coach. I've never looked back. I've had a great career. During the 7 years I coached high school basketball I had some chances to go to different junior colleges as an assistant coach. But Patsy and I really enjoyed Tulsa. I enjoyed coaching high school players. I felt like I could really have an effect on their lives because there were a lot of youngsters that only had single parents. That was a time too that the integration of public schools came into Tulsa. I remember when I got there in 1959, McClain opened and they changed the boundaries. All of the African-American students at that time, for the most part, all went to Booker T. Washington. When they changed the boundaries, McClain took a certain number of black students and so did Tulsa Central. That was another thing that was really interesting because I had never been around black people that much. I never had a black player on my team at Oklahoma State. We were all Caucasians when I played. So the first African-American students came and the first young black man was named Rollie McCaskill. We had a lot of black students. I think that was a time when it was interesting to see a lot of white students, who had never had any kind of a relationship with the black students, find out that we are all the same. So it was a very, very healthy time I thought for a coach to be in a position to help kids in so many different ways, so I turned down a lot of jobs.

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**Chapter 9—2:12****Fire & Oral Roberts**

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**John Erling:** While you were at Tulsa Central, you and Patsy drove to Stillwater for a game.

While driving back to Tulsa you heard something on the radio?

**Eddie Sutton:** We went over to Stillwater with Bill Connors the great sportswriter who worked for the *Tulsa World* and his wife Nita. We drove over in Bill's car. He dropped us off there at Tulsa Central, which is the old Tulsa Central downtown. We got in our car and we were driving. At about 21st and Peoria, we heard on the radio that Eddie Sutton, the head basketball coach at Tulsa Central's home burned to the ground tonight. We looked at each other and rushed home. The firemen were still there. We had a little, three-bedroom, brick home and it was completely destroyed. The brick was still standing, but it was quite a shock. One of the neat things...Oral Roberts tried to hire me three different times to be the head basketball coach at Oral Roberts University. He befriended me when I was a coach at Tulsa Central. Richard must have been about a seventh or eighth grader then. Mr. Roberts played golf out at Tulsa Country Club and I got to play golf with them several times. He loved basketball so he knew who I was and had followed my career. I know with Oral Roberts some people didn't like him as much as others, and so many people loved him. He was a wonderful man. The next morning at 10am, Bill Connors and a few friends of mine were at the house nosing around. Mr. Roberts drives up in his car and brings me an entire wardrobe of his clothes. He and I were the same size. He brought me sport coats, slacks, shoes, socks, suits, underwear. He brought me the whole thing and said, "I know you lost everything and I thought I could help you out a little bit."

**JE:** Wow.

**ES:** Then after that, like I said he tried to hire me three different times. He was a man that I always admired for a lot of the wonderful things that he did and for being able to build such a great university.

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**Chapter 10—4:31****Idaho**

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**Eddie Sutton:** In 1966, one of the neatest people that I had ever met, James Taylor came into town. He called me and said, "I'm flying into Tulsa to look at the Learning Resource Center

at Oral Roberts University. I'm looking for a basketball coach and they tell me you coach a fair game." I said, "I am flattered that you would call me, but I'm just not interested." He said, "I don't give up that easily. I want you to meet me. I'll just take 30 minutes of your time." He was the greatest salesman I had ever met. I agreed to meet him. It ended up being a 4-hour conversation. Dr. Taylor always called me Sutton. He said, "Sutton, I know you don't make very much money." At that time I was making \$6,000 a year and I said, "You've got that right." He said, "You probably don't even have enough money you take your bride on a vacation." I said, "You're correct." He said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I will give you some gasoline money and out you up for a couple of days. I want you to drive up there to Idaho, to God's Country to an area called Magic Valley. I want you to drive up there and take a look at what I have." I talked to Patsy and I said, "Okay." So we drove through the panhandle of Oklahoma, up into western Kansas and through Denver and across Wyoming. We drive into Pocatello, which is in the southeast corner of Idaho. We followed the Snake River all the way up to Twin Falls, Idaho, which was a town of about 20,000 people. It's about halfway between Boise and Pocatello. I asked a gas station attendant where the College of Southern Idaho was. He looked at me kind of strangely and said, "The President's office is three blocks ahead and one block to the right." So I drove up in front of the building and there was a sign for a doctor and a dentist and lawyer and College of Southern Idaho. I looked at Patsy and I said, "Isn't it strange the way the president has his office here? Why would Dr. Taylor be here? We went in and we visited Dr. Taylor for a little bit. Finally I said, "Dr. Taylor can we go look at the campus?" He said, "You know what? I forgot to tell you, we haven't built it yet." I said, "What?" He said, "No, but I've got the greatest plans in the world." He whips out these blueprints on me. The rascal convinced us to go. He said, "This will be an adventure for you." They gave me \$7,500 a year. It was an adventure because high school would be out at 3:30pm. We would start classes at 4pm until 10pm. Then we would practice from 10pm to 1:30am for three years. It was an educational experience because Dr. Taylor was so sharp. We went out and raised money. We went out and knocked on every merchant's door selling \$25 charter memberships into the Golden Eagle Booster Club. We got enough funds to go out and buy a house there in the community. That's where we would house the six players that weren't local players that we would bring in. I took two of the players from Tulsa Central and I took one from Indiana and one from New York and a couple from Utah. We had a lot of fun. When I left there after three years to go to Creighton, the campus was open. It truly is one of the great community colleges. They now have an arena up there that seats about 5,000 or 6,000 people. They have won many more games than I ever won. We won 83 and 14 and it was the worst record of any college coach that had ever been there.

**John Erling:** This was in Twin Falls, Idaho. Four black people were living in the town at the time. You brought in some black players and The John Birch Society thought it was a conspiracy to integrate Twin Falls?

**ES:** It was a wonderful experience. Again, it was 1966. There were students in high school that had never been face-to-face with an African-American before. There were four black adults living in Twin Falls. The four young men that we brought in were wonderful human beings. It was a wonderful opening of eyes in all of those kids. All they had ever seen on television were the riots at Watts in Los Angeles and in Detroit. So they were able to get a true impression of black people and realize that they are no different than white people.

**JE:** Right.

**ES:** So that was a great time for me.

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## Chapter 11—5:50 Creighton—Omaha

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**John Erling:** In 1969 you went to Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. How did that come about?

**Eddie Sutton:** There was a doctor in Twin Falls who had graduated from Creighton. He called the president of the university and a couple of other professors and told them they ought to take a look at me. They invited me to visit and they ended up giving me the job. It was a Catholic institution. The Jesuit priests ran the university. I was named the basketball coach and the athletic director. They didn't play football there, but they had all of other sports. It was a wonderful experience because I had never really been around Catholic people that much. In my little town of Bucklin there were two or three Catholics, but no priests and no Catholic Church.

**JE:** Is your family of any particular faith?

**ES:** Yes, we went to the Christian Church. My mother was raised in the Church of Christ. When I was growing up we went to an independent Christian Church there. My mother and dad were both good Christians. I had more fun with the Jesuits. I thought they were wonderful guys. One of the things that happened soon after I got there was the president of the university died. I had always hated going to funerals. It was always demoralizing to me. When this Catholic priest did the service for this man that died, it was a celebration. The priest changed his black robes to white robes. It was a celebration. I visited with him and he said, "If you really believe in Christianity, you know he's in a much better place." He had been ill. It

really changed my whole outlook on funerals. Creighton was a wonderful small school with great support from the people there. I got to know Bob DeVaney and Tom Osborne well because they would have golf outings to the country clubs in Omaha. They always invited me. That was a time when the Cornhuskers were really rolling and they really had great ball clubs. That was another plus. Also, I played baseball. I had a chance coming out of high school to sign a baseball contract, but I would have ended up in a Class-D League, so I made the wise decision to go to college. I've always liked baseball. As the athletic director for Creighton, I was also the tournament director for the College World Series. So for five years I was the tournament director and I saw every inning of every game of the College World Series. There were three of us that made up the Games Committee that runs the World Series. The other two were baseball coaches, one from Washington State and one from BYU. I had a great time there and that was just a plus. I was involved in the basketball part of it and I got to be close to college baseball. I hired Larry Cochell who was at Emporia State Teachers College. Creighton, since they were hosting the College World Series, wanted to improve their baseball program. Bob Gibson, the great baseball player for the Cardinals, had been a baseball and basketball player at Creighton before I got there. The school decided that they wanted to elevate baseball to the same level as basketball. I hired Larry Cochell, who later became the coach at ORU, and OU and a couple of schools out in California. He became a great baseball coach. He helped elevate the program.

**JE:** While at Creighton, in March 1974, you coached them to the Sweet 16.

**ES:** I really had an outstanding ball club. We had been building it up because we had been recruiting a bunch of young players as freshmen and they had been starting almost every year. It was an outstanding basketball team. Creighton was an independent at that time. Now they are in the Missouri Valley Conference. The regional tournament was held in Tulsa at ORU. The University of Louisville was there. We were there as an independent. The University of Kansas was there with Ted Owens as head coach—they had won the Big 8. Oral Roberts played as well. It was probably the best team Oral Roberts had ever had. Ken Trickey was head coach of the ORU ball club. We played Kansas the first night. They beat us by two points. ORU beat Louisville. Back then they still played third-place games. So we played Louisville for third place and won. I thought Oral Roberts had the best team in the country. They had an outstanding ball club. They probably would have beat Kansas three out of four times, but they didn't that night. Kansas ended up beating them by a couple or three points and Kansas went to the Final Four that season.

**JE:** Is it true that while at Creighton in 1973, you interviewed for the OSU basketball coaching job?

**ES:** I did interview for it and I would have taken it had they offered me the job. But they hired someone else, a guy by the name of Guy Strong. He was from Kentucky.

**JE:** A lot of people might not know that you tried for that job in 1973.

**ES:** No, I don't think very many people know that.

## **Chapter 12—9:45**

### **Arkansas**

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**John Erling:** You're tenure through 1974 was at Creighton and then you were named coach at Arkansas.

**Eddie Sutton:** It was a strange deal, too. Bill Connors was a dear friend. He was also a good friend of Frank Broyles. He tried to tell Frank that he ought to hire me. Well, Mr. Roberts was trying to hire me. At Duke, I was one of three people that they interviewed. Carl James was the athletic director at Duke. He later became the Commissioner of the Big 8 conference in later years. Carl James came out to watch our team play Kansas in the NCAA tournament. There were three of us that went back to be interviewed. Bob Boyd was at Southern California—he interviewed first. Patsy and I went back there and Frank by that point was really after me. He was calling me every day. I told him that I was committed to visiting Duke. The other person being interviewed was coaching at Utah and was playing in NIT tournament, so he wasn't going to be able to be interviewed for like a week after I was there. Patsy and I went back there and were interviewed. Duke has changed their academic standards for athletics. It's a little bit different now than it was then. I called them wildcards. They didn't get any break on academics. Basketball players had to have the same grades that incoming freshman as regular students had. That's quite high. I asked, "How do you compete with state schools like Maryland and Clemson and schools like that? Their academic standards are not as high and they are recruiting the same players." He said, "Well, you just have to be selective." I said that concerns me a little bit. Anyway, Frank was after me. Finally, we came back and visited Fayetteville again. He convinced me to be the coach. He was very persuasive. One of the neat things that I always thought about Arkansas, they had had some success there, but they had really fallen on hard times because they had only won 33 games in the four previous years before I got there. Bob Knight and Dean Smith and I were all on the basketball board together. They were telling me not to go to Arkansas. They felt it was a losing place. They told me I couldn't win there. They told me to go back to Creighton for another year and then I would get a job in the NCC or the Big Ten and that they would help me. I made the decision to go to Arkansas. They thought I had lost my mind when I took the job. The other thing that I thought was about my great-grandfather. I have these wonderful letters he wrote. He was a Colonel in the Union forces and he was stationed in Fayetteville, Arkansas during the Civil War. They lived up in the central part of Arkansas. He wrote these wonderful letters to my great-grandmother. He told her about the horrors of war. There were some small battles

fought there in the northwest corner of Arkansas, The Battle of Pea Ridge. So I thought it was my calling. So I got to Arkansas and after getting there in the early days and looking at the facilities I thought gosh, maybe I've made a mistake. But what a great time we had in building program.

**JE:** You were there from 1974 to 1985. You rejuvenated their basketball program. Before you came to their campus all the talk in Arkansas was about football. Then you broke into the Top 10 for the first time?

**ES:** Right. We had two great assistant coaches. Gene Keady I hired from Hutchinson Junior College. He was with me for four years. He later became a great coach at Purdue. Pat Foster was another one. Then we were able to get some wonderful players. We hit pay dirt only got Sidney Moncrief, Marvin Delph and Ron Brewer who Al McGuire called "The Triplets". We went to the Final 4 in 1978 with that ballclub. We were off and running when we had them. Out of the 11 years I was there, I think we're in the NCAA 8 or 9 years.

**JE:** In 1977, I think you owned the nation's longest winning streak with 18 consecutive wins? For the season in 1977 year record was 25-1.

**ES:** It had to be 25-2 because we got beat in the NCAA Tournament.

**JE:** Okay.

**ES:** I don't remember who beat us during the regular season, but we lost to Wake Forest in the NCAA Tournament down in Norman. I think 25-2 was our record. The next year we went 32-4, when we went to the Final Four in 1978. We had that whole team back that next year. We should have gone a long ways in 1977. We had Wake Forest down by about 17 I think and then we got into foul trouble. Two of our guys fouled out and they ended up beating us by one or two points. But I think the biggest thing was we knew how good we were the following year and we went to the Final 4.

**JE:** I would like to point out that in 1977 you are named the Coach of the Year there at Arkansas.

**ES:** Yes, and the next year I was National Coach of the year.

**JE:** In 1979 Arkansas was in the Elite 8. It was Arkansas against Indiana State, and yes, a name everybody knows.

**ES:** Larry Bird was a great player and certainly one of the great players of that time and all of college basketball and a great pro player. In 1979, we had lost two of The Triplets, Delph and Brewer, but we still had Sidney Moncrief. We had an outstanding freshman year. Somehow we ended up getting back to the Elite 8 game in Cincinnati. The winner of the game between the Razorbacks and Indiana State would go to the Final 4 in Salt Lake City. It was one of the great games I have ever coached in. Both teams played flawless basketball. It was a wonderful game. Both teams played with great competitive spirit. You had Moncrief and Bird, two first team all-Americans going head-to-head. It came down to where we had the ball with 30 seconds left to go and the game was tied. U.S. Reed was

a freshman. He later became an outstanding player for us at Arkansas. He got tripped in the midcourt area. It should have been a foul, but they didn't call anything. He went to his knees and then he got back on his feet and they called walking, which was a proper call if you go to the floor you get back up with the ball in your hands. Now they have the ball with about 20 seconds left to go. Everybody knew they were going to get the ball to Bird and isolate the area. Moncrief covered him and just had him where he drove the ball to the elbow of the lane. He couldn't get his shot off. Moncrief just had him blanketed. He threw the ball across the lane to one of his players. Scott Hastings covered him and the guy went up for his shot and he was right handed and he couldn't get the shot off. He transferred the ball to his left hand in midair and just threw it. The ball went up and hit the rim and bounced about two or three times and dropped in as the buzzer went off and we got beat by two points. I don't know whether we could have beaten Michigan State in the national championship game, but we would have fared better than Indiana State because we had a lot more quickness. That was the thing that eventually beat Indiana State against Michigan State because Michigan State was so much quicker. Michigan State was the best team. Had we got to the finals, we would've won in the series. But in basketball, where it's one game and one shot, anything can happen. So, it was a disappointment, but it was also a game where I walked out of that arena and told the team, "Guys, all a coach can ever ask of you is to give your very best." That's all I ever ask of my assistant coaches. We prepared as well as you could ever prepare for a ballclub. We went out there and played almost a flawless game. We turned the ball over three times. We shot over 50% from the field. We shot 70% at the free-throw line. It was just an outstanding game and we played great defense, yet it wasn't meant to be. They hit a fluky shot and won the game. I told them, "When you know deep in your heart you giving your best, whether it's in basketball or you're getting ready for a test or whatever it might be, if you know you've done your best then you can accept that. It's when you don't give your best and that happens that you live with a life of regrets."

**JE:** You had some fun down in Austin, Texas and the Field House known as The Drum. One game as I understand it was memorable after the Big 12 was formed. You walked out on the floor and did something right there in the middle of the floor and you won over the Texas fans.

**ES:** I always had great respect for the University of Texas. Of course, Texas was always the biggest rivalry for the Razorbacks when you're in the Southwest Conference. Arkansas was the only team outside the state of Texas to be in the old Southwest Conference. So I always had great respect for them. It was always a big game for us. One time I gave them the hook 'em horns sign. I think for the most part most of their fans always respected the Razorbacks and certainly respected the Cowboys when I got to OSU.

**JE:** You won your 700th game in The Drum?

**ES:** I did. I had a great ball club. That was the game where the players carried me off the floor. I heard a few boos, but I think most of the people from Texas always had respect for Oklahoma State.

**JE:** When you were at Arkansas for 11 years your record was 260 wins and 75 losses.

**ES:** That sounds right.

**JE:** It included five Southwest Conference Championships, nine NCAA Tournament appearances and a Final Four appearance in 1978.

**ES:** Yes, we had a great run there in Arkansas.

## Chapter 13—3:27

### President Bill Clinton

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**Eddie Sutton:** I also have some wonderful memories in other areas. I got to know a dear friend in Bill Clinton. He was teaching in the law school when I got there. I got to know him and got him interested in basketball. My wife Patsy was very active what in his campaign for governor. She ran his campaign a couple of the times that he ran, so we were good friends. Of course, when he ran for the presidency, the night of the first election, I'll never forget this—he asked Patsy and I to come down to Little Rock. So we went down there. His mother was there and some of his other friends. Finally, he came over to me and gave me a big hug. I said, "Congratulations Bill." I still call him Bill today, but at that time I said, "I guess I'll have to call you Mr. President." He smiled and I said, "I want you to always remember this as long as you live. There was a time when I was more famous than you." (Laughter) That's true because when I went there in 1974 and he was in law school, nobody knew Bill Clinton. (Laughter)

**John Erling:** Did you ever stay in the White House when he was there?

**ES:** Patsy and I stayed there four times. What a wonderful experience. In fact, our boys got to stay there one time. It's too bad every American can't have that experience of going to the White House. It's such a marvelous place with so much history. You could spend days and days in there. That's what I tried to do is just absorb everything I possibly could.

**JE:** Did you stay in the Lincoln bedroom?

**ES:** We stayed in the Lincoln bedroom one time, yes.

**JE:** What was that like?

**ES:** I was looking for the ghost but I never did see him. (Laughter) it was just an unbelievable experience. One funny thing happened. We went to play golf one time when I was up

there. It was Hillary's brother, the president and myself. There were 16 Secret Service men that went out with us. They had already cleared the golf course. But anyway, there were four Secret Service guys with this at the tee box and they just followed us all the way to the green. There were four ahead of us, two on each side. Then there were four in the trees up on each side. There were 16 of these guys total. The ones up in the trees had binoculars. There was about a 6-inch rough. About the third or fourth hole, the president hooks one over in the rough. These guys, man, all 16 of them came hustling down to look for the golf ball. The same thing happened to me about three holes later and not one of them came over. (Laughter) I said, "Boy, you're hospitality stinks!"

**JE:** Did you—especially your first time in the White House, when you were lying in bed, did you think, wow, here I am this kid from a farm in Kansas sleeping in the White House?

**ES:** Yes, that's probably about what I was thinking. I couldn't believe I was there. Of course, you just have the run of the White House when you are there. I told Patsy, "This is really something." Patsy's parents were wonderful people, but they were of meager means. Like I told you earlier, with my parents we didn't even have a car when I was growing up, we had a pickup. I always hoped I would get a scholarship so I could go to college, which I did. But then to get to that point (referring to White House) you stop and think this is unbelievable. It's like a fairytale.

## Chapter 14—7:15

### Kentucky

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**John Erling:** When you were coaching in Arkansas, what would you say was the most memorable game?

**Eddie Sutton:** Well, there were so many wonderful memories. I think taking the team in 1978 to the Final Four, boy they were as good as Kentucky, the team that beat us and won the national championship that year. That was a big thrill. One of the biggest thrills in going to the Final 4 was the day before the first game. It was played in The Checkerdome in St. Louis. We went out the day before the game, on a Friday. There were about 10,000 people who just came out to watch the teams practice. You thought, what is going on here? It was just like Oklahoma State in 1995 when we had Big Country and we went out there. There were about 20,000 for that. That was the day that Big Country broke the backboard. I would say playing in that Final 4 was the biggest thrill as far as games are concerned.

**JE:** You left Arkansas for Kentucky in 1985?

**ES:** Correct.

**JE:** You that you would crawl to Lexington, Kentucky for the job?

**ES:** All of my life I've made some dumb comments—but that was the worst. Frank Broyles, who was the athletic director, he and I had a few problems. But Frank had had some problems with other coaches like Lou Holtz. Frank is a wonderful guy and did a marvelous job, but there are some times that egos clash. Kentucky, when the head-coaching position opened, I mean, there's not a coach in America that doesn't think from the outside looking in that Kentucky's one of the top 3 or 4 best jobs. So when I made that comment, it wasn't about the fans—because Arkansas fans are the very best. There's none better than those people. They've been very loyal and certainly been very good to me. When I made that comment, it was directed at Frank. Well, it was certainly misinterpreted by a lot of people in Arkansas—believe me. I have lived that down because every chance I ever had I tried to correct that, but that was really a very, very uncalled for remark.

**JE:** Then your first game as the University of Kentucky coach, the Cats beat Northwestern State 77-58 and you were off and running.

**ES:** Knowing everything I know, I probably never would have left Arkansas, because the two places I thought I would always end my coaching career were Arkansas, or if Oklahoma State ever offered me another opportunity to come back I might go back there. I want to clear that up, though. Frank and I became great friends after that. We made up, but I made that decision to go to Kentucky for a lot of reasons. It is one of the great coaching schools. It is one of the best places a coach could ever coach. But there are some things that aren't as pleasant as you would like. For instance, if you go out to eat, there's never any time that you can just go and be with your family and have dinner. You are always going to be bombarded with numerous people wanting autographs and things like that.

**JE:** So that was different from Arkansas?

**ES:** Well, I still had to sign a lot of autographs, but I think the people in Arkansas were courteous enough that they would leave you alone until you got through eating. But boy, in Kentucky, those people...Basketball in Kentucky is almost like a religion. There are people there that when the Cats lose, they go into days of mourning. It's that big a deal for a lot of people, not all of them. Ninety-five percent of the people are no different than basketball fans all across the country. But there are a percentage of people in Kentucky that take it too seriously. Anyway, for a long time it was okay.

**JE:** When you first got there, the newspaper wrote, "Kentuckians like their coaches hair like they like their Bourbon, straight." They wondered why it took you so long to move your family from Arkansas. You signed a \$125,000 deal with Nike shoes, which ended a long association with Converse. You announced a policy of not speaking to service clubs and businessmen didn't like that. You talked to the New Jersey nets, which angered the

Kentucky fans. So, this was some kind of chaos you were in.

**ES:** Well, first of all, it wasn't the first time that I decided not to speak to service clubs. Frank had told me in Arkansas after I had been all over this state. He said, "Let me tell you why I have a policy. I don't speak at service clubs because if I speak at a Rotary Club meeting and I turn down a Kiwanis Club meeting, they are mad. If you turn them all down—that's your policy." I finally did that. When I got to Kentucky, that's what I said. That made a lot of them mad. But I don't remember talking to the New Jersey Nets. If I did, it wasn't about a job. I don't know how that got in the newspaper. At one time I had permed my hair. That's what they are talking about when they referred to straight hair. They wanted me to get straight hair, which I did. (Laughter) Not because of them though, but because my family said, "Let's go back to the way your hair used to be."

**JE:** You coached The Wildcats for four years, led them to the Elite 8 in the 1986 NCAA Tournament. Two seasons later you were 25-5, captured their 37th SEC title and were ranked 6th in the nation before losing to Villanova in the 1988 tournament.

**ES:** The first year I was there, I think we went 32-4. But the NCAA changed a regulation that would never happen again. We played in the SEC. We beat Alabama and LSU both in Round Robins, both teams, each time. We met them in the SEC Tournament and we beat them again. Now we had beaten Alabama and LSU three times. We go to the NCAA Tournament and lo and behold in the Sweet 16 in Atlanta, Georgia—Georgia Tech has won, so they are there. But so is LSU and Alabama and so is University of Kentucky—three teams from the SEC. We had beaten LSU and Alabama three times already. Georgia and ourselves were favored to play in the championship game. We beat Alabama for the fourth time. LSU somehow upset Georgia Tech. LSU had a good ballclub, but they beat Georgia Tech. So now we are playing Georgia Tech for the right to go to Dallas for the Final 4. We didn't play very well. We got into foul trouble. They ended up beating us by one or two points. The thing about that that was crazy, because I'm not sure we weren't the best team in the country, we had beaten Louisville in double figures earlier in the year. Louisville had a wonderful team, but we had beaten them. That's also a big rivalry game with Kentucky. The biggest games on Kentucky's schedule for basketball are Louisville, Indiana and the University of Tennessee. Those are their big rivalries. Anyway, we had beaten Louisville and Louisville ends up winning the national title in Dallas. That was a great Kentucky team. It was one of those things where you don't ever like to play anybody three times, let alone four times in basketball in high school or college. The NCAA Tournament changed their structure after that. That will never happen where a conference team has to play somebody for that third time unless they meet somewhere way down the line, like in the Final Four.

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**Chapter 15—2:29****Happy Chandler**

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**John Erling:** You received a letter from Happy Chandler. I want you to talk about that for the record since we are doing this for history's sake. Albert Benjamin "Happy" Chandler was the 44th and 49th governor of Kentucky. He was a U.S. Senator. He was the second Commissioner of U.S. baseball and a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. As a matter of fact, he had a very significant contribution in integrating the major leagues beginning with Jackie Robinson in 1947. Tell us about the letter.

**Eddie Sutton:** He befriended me when I first got there. I was the first coach in 53 years that didn't have Kentucky ties. There were a few people that thought they should have hired Pat Riley or some Kentuckian. Governor Chandler came to me and he said, "I know you can coach. Ninety-nine percent of the people in Kentucky know you can coach and we are thrilled that you are here. There are a few doubting Thomases, but I am going to be your friend." We would go to lunch every Thursday. He was a great storyteller. Here was a guy who was the Commissioner of Baseball when he broke the color line and they brought Jackie Robinson in to baseball in 1947. He was a U.S. Senator when Truman was President. He used to go to poker games in the White House with Truman and a lot of the other Senators. He told me some great stories. He was also governor of Kentucky for two terms. About two-thirds of the way through my first season there I received a letter. I still have it in my office. All it says is "My dear coach, unpack. —Happy" The letter meant that I had proven that I could coach to the people of the Bluegrass. Another funny story, one time we were sitting in a restaurant in one of my latter years at Kentucky. He said, "Coach, you know how I love those thoroughbreds. I love watching those ponies run. I love going to the races at Church Hill Downs in Louisville and going to Lexington. There's nothing more beautiful than watching those thoroughbreds come down that stretch running. You know that there's never been a jackass win the Kentucky Derby?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "It takes a thoroughbred. If you'll tell those darn assistant coaches to quit recruiting you so many jackasses and get you more thoroughbreds, you'll find coaching is a lot easier." (Laughter). I said, "Yes sir, that's true."

**Chapter 16—4:18****Alcohol**

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**John Erling:** On your personal life, along about this time, leading up to 1987, you checked into the Betty Ford Clinic for alcoholism.

**Eddie Sutton:** That's true.

**JE:** Talk about that a little bit. When did this begin to affect your life?

**ES:** I talk to young people today about the dangers of alcohol and drugs. I never had a drink in high school. The first time I had a beer was in college. I never really drank very much at all when I coached high school ball or when I was at Southern Idaho. At Creighton I began to consume a little more and in Arkansas. Finally I got to a point when I got to Kentucky, I knew that I was not as able to really control it like I needed to. So I checked myself into Betty Ford Treatment Center. It helped me a great deal. Through the years, there have been a few slips along the way, but for the most part I have done much better. But I think that's one of the dangers that all youngsters must understand. There's nothing wrong with having a drink if that doesn't affect your religious or personal rules or regulations that you have in your life. But if you do, you just have to be darn careful about it. One thing I have learned through the years is that there is a certain percentage of people in every family that has a greater chance of getting addicted to alcohol or to a drug. I always caution youngsters to be careful if they do decide to drink. You have to understand that in all families there is a certain percentage that could be more conducive to get addicted. I learned a great deal. I have certainly tried to pass that along to all of the players that I have coached through the years.

**JE:** It's interesting. A lot of people think that just because you received help at a treatment center that that is the eternal fix-all. It wasn't in your case because it reared its ugly head later on when you were at OSU.

**ES:** It did. You know, one thing, if I ever had a drink and got behind the wheel I always drove exceptionally careful. Boy, I didn't ever want to have an accident. At OSU, in the last year I coached, I was having severe back problems. I eventually had to have back surgery, but I was really in a lot of pain. I had been taking some pain medication. I was in such a hurry I went down and got me something to drink. Lo and behold, we were getting to go on a trip and I backed into a lady and had an accident. So then I went back to treatment again. Since that time I have been just fine, but it's a day-to-day process. Once you become addicted to alcohol, it's an everyday fight. There's AA, which is an organization for recovering alcoholics. Part of the teaching of that program is one day at a time. That's what you do. Every morning you wake up and say a prayer to ask that you make it through

the day without even thinking about a drink.

**JE:** That was in 2006 when that happened. But today in 2010, is that something that you think about? Is that a compulsion for you? Or has that been lifted from you?

**ES:** I don't have any urge to drink. But that doesn't mean that in a certain situation that you couldn't succumb to temptation again. I think it's something that every day you wake up you want to make sure that you continue to live a clean life.

**JE:** You began then to speak more publicly about the dangers of alcohol.

**ES:** I do. I've tried to help young people that have had problems. I have counseled some of the college students when I was at OSU that had been to treatment centers. I told them that the road to recovery is day-to-day. I've tried to help people. I think when you try to help people sometimes it helps you. I have given some speeches in different places to different groups. I thank God that I have been able to stay clean.

## Chapter 17—5:17

### Emery Package

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**John Erling:** In Kentucky, let's just address this for a moment. The *Los Angeles Daily News* reports in 1988 that a package sent to Kentucky recruit Chris Mills was found unsealed in an Emery Worldwide Air Freight terminal in Los Angeles on March 31st. Workers said \$1,000 was discovered inside. The package lists University of Kentucky assistant Dwane Casey as the sender. Casey said that he never did it and there was never any proof that he did it. He settled a lawsuit with Emery for defamation of character. What is your take on what happened? This was a major story across the country.

**Eddie Sutton:** Before we arrived there, the newspaper had done all of this reporting on all of these former players. They said that Kentucky had violated the NCAA rules. The newspaper wanted to pull a surprise. The NCAA came in to investigate. All of a sudden they couldn't prove anything. So, it became kind of an embarrassment for the NCAA because there certainly was enough proof there probably that Kentucky should have been getting some kind of punishment for what had happened. So that had happened and then I went to coach at Kentucky. Everybody knew I had had a clean program everywhere I had been and that I didn't violate rules. I think that's one of the reasons they hired me. I was told, "You can't do anything wrong here." I had cautioned our assistant coaches and everyone that we didn't want to do anything out of line. We didn't have to, because we didn't think there was any reason we would ever have to cheat at Kentucky. You shouldn't

have to with all of the advantages that you have there. When this happened, I said, “Holy smokes, somebody has set us up.” First of all, I’ve never heard of an Emery package exploding or breaking open in a warehouse. These are the kinds of packages that you have to have some kind of a knife or something to cut them open. Somebody had set us up. Well, the NCAA and the newspapers were so upset thinking this time we are going to get Kentucky. There were about 10 NCAA investigators and the local newspaper investigators involved. They were all in there for the first couple of years that I was there trying to prove this thing had happened before I had ever arrived. So when this thing happened—boy here they come again. Well, it had never been proven and it never was. Dwane got a big settlement out of it.

**JE:** Yes, \$6.9 million dollars.

**ES:** But it ended up that we got punished even though it could never be proven and in a court of law—it was thrown out. Even today I don’t think with what they had they would have challenged it. I think they were so frustrated in past years with what had happened that they took full advantage of it to penalize the University of Kentucky and us. The deal with the Emery package, the thing that was crazy about it was Dwane had been in Los Angeles the day before this happened to visit with a recruit and his father. So if we were going to cheat and give somebody money, you would do it in person, you wouldn’t send it through the mail. That was the thing that was always crazy I thought. I don’t know. I guess we will never know. Dwane said he didn’t do it, so I have to believe him. One thing that came out of that, you always, if you have a setback say to yourself—what can we do to do a better job? When we came to Oklahoma State that was one of the things I told the assistant coaches. I said, “Don’t you ever do anything wrong or you won’t be here long.” I started probably policing my assistants much better than I had done in Kentucky because there I had always just told them what to do and trusted them and hoped that they would do that. Certainly we were punished for it.

**JE:** So, what appears to be a set-up could have come from another school? Did you wonder if somebody was trying to make you look bad personally?

**ES:** I thought that was possible because there are two or three boosters that had violated NCAA rules in the previous regime. They had done some things. They told me once, “I know you’re a great coach, but we’re not sure about you’re recruiting. Let us get the players for you and you coach them.” I said, “No, that’s not going to work. We are not going to do that.” They said, “If you don’t do this, I don’t think you’ll ever win a national title.” I told them, “If I won a national title, I want to be able to look at myself in the mirror.” I thought to myself, maybe some of those guys set it up. There were a lot of rumors that flew around, but nobody knows what happened.

**JE:** In the wake of that investigation, it did force you to resign as their head coach?

**ES:** I did resign. I worked for Nike for one year and did not coach. I had a lot of fun doing that. Then Oklahoma State gave me the opportunity to come back into coaching the next year.

**JE:** That was when Leonard Hamilton decided to leave in favor of Miami and that was the break you needed.

## Chapter 18—5:45

### OSU—Big Country

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**John Erling:** Then you were at Oklahoma State from 1990 to 2006. What condition was the program in when you came to OSU in 1990?

**Eddie Sutton:** Leonard Hamilton, who had been my assistant coach one year at Kentucky and I had helped him get the job at OSU, had done an outstanding job of getting the players. He had had some success. They had not been in the NCAA Tournament, but they had been in the NIT. He left me three very good players in Byron Houston and Darwyn Alexander and Corey Williams. Of course, Sean Sutton played an instrumental part in our success the first two years. He was a great point guard and he taught Corey and everyone how guards should play. He was very helpful in making it all happen.

**JE:** So he was kind of a player coach in a way.

**ES:** He was a player-coach. You know, they had not been to the NCAA Tournament since 1983. So, the enthusiasm for basketball wasn't like it was when I was playing there. That was one thing Mr. Iba was so thrilled about when I came back. He was hopeful that we could restore that enthusiasm for the sport. We were very fortunate with the players we had returning and with Shawn. We were also able to recruit a couple of other guys that helped us. Not only did we go to the NCAA tournament that first year but we went to the Sweet 16 and did the same thing the next year and we were off and running.

**JE:** You had players like Bryant "Big Country" Reeves and Randy Rutherford. Tell us a little bit about Big Country and how you stumbled on to him and how that happened. Bryant Reeves was not recruited by very many schools. A lot of people thought we had lost our mind when we took him because he never really was an outstanding high school player. He was big, but I think a lot of people thought we were not very smart in taking him. The one thing that I saw in Big Country is that he had those great soft hands. When you get a big players whose got wonderful hands and he has a burning desire to be a better player—I think you have to take a chance. When we recruited Bryant, we fully expected

to red shirt him for the first year and the second year. We didn't think he would play very much. In the third year he probably wouldn't play very much or be a starter. We thought maybe in the fourth or fifth year he could be a starter for us. That was really our game plan. I had never seen a player improve so quickly. Mr. Iba told me the same thing. He said, "When we recruited Bob Kurland, it took him over a year to improve in what Big Country did in the first month of practice sessions. He had never been in a weight room in high school. They didn't even have enough players at his high school to play 5 on 5. I think he had eight players on his high school team. He was overweight. He didn't have tough competition in high school, so those were some reasons we thought we would red shirt him that first year. He just got better and better—we had him all summer long and we worked with him. When school started he had made some progress. We had him in the weight room. But he just got better and better every day. It came up that we were playing in the preseason NIT and I told our coaching staff about a week before, "I don't think we can red shirt him, we are going to have to play him." I'll never forget that we were playing Evansville in that first game there in Gallagher-Iba Arena, he was so nervous. I looked up in the stands and his parents looked like they were about to pass out they were so nervous. I thought gosh, he's liable to wet his pants when they announce him in the starting line-up. He went out and he did okay. He scored 4 or 5 points and 4 or 5 rebounds. So we won the game. By that time, Sean had befriended him and they had nicknamed him "Country". Later on we were walking across the campus to the student union where we had our pregame meal before we were getting ready to play Purdue. He was more nervous than he was the first game. Sean asked him, "Country, why are you so nervous? Purdue's not much better than Evansville. We're going to win the game and then we are going to New York City and play in Madison Square Garden in the semi-finals of the tournament." He said, "Sean, that's why I am so nervous. I have never been in an airplane before." So his first road trip was to go to the Big Apple and play in the biggest arena in the world as far as college basketball is concerned. We beat Pittsburgh in the first game. Then we played Georgia Tech for the championship game and we defeated them. After the game, this New York City sportswriter came in and he said, "Could I talk to Country?" I said, "Certainly." He said, "Bryant, describe Gans, Oklahoma." Now, Gans is a small community between Sallisaw and Fort Smith, Arkansas. His description of Gans was this...he said, "You drive into town and the school is on your left. You drive a little farther and the post office is on your right and if you drive a little farther you are out of town." There were no stores in Gans, Oklahoma at that time. But he later became a great player. The next year he was just outstanding. Then he became the Big 8 Player of the Year. He was just an unbelievable player. I call him my miracle child because I've never had a player improve as much as he did.

**JE:** He went on and played in the pros?

**ES:** He went to the pros. Vancouver took him in the first round. He played several years and then he hurt himself and had to get out of the pros. But he saved a lot of his money and he's doing very well now. He has a cattle ranch back over in his area of the state.

## Chapter 19—3:03

### Close Games

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**John Erling:** In 2004, a team led by John Lucas and Joey Graham, Big 12 Player of the Year Tony Allen. Let's talk about that with a school record of 31 wins and 4 losses. You advanced to the Final Four as the No. 2 seed and the 2004 NCAA Tournament. You finished the season No. 4 in the final AP Coaches Poll. You guys were riding high.

**Eddie Sutton:** When you get to the Final Four, in my opinion, you need a lucky bounce or a friendly call sometimes. The best team doesn't always win the national title game. Unlike it is in the pros where you have a series, in college playoffs you only have one game. If you don't win it, you go home and pack your bags for another season. I've always thought that when you get to the Final Four, you need something good to happen. We played that first game against Georgia Tech. I think it would have been better had we played a series. But, they hit a shot at the buzzer to beat us and Connecticut went on to the championship game. But what a marvelous team that was and what fun we had. A lot of those guys came back the next year and we thought we would have another shot. We lost Tony Allen, but we had the other guys all returning and got beat on a last-second shot again in the Sweet 16 Game by the University of Arizona.

**JE:** How did you take those close calls? You were so close and then in a second it's gone.

**ES:** Well, we won a lot of games like that too. I guess percentagewise they even out. But they are difficult to take when you know that your ball club probably is good enough. If we had played a series with Georgia Tech the previous year, we would win in a series. But you only play one game and the kid hit a heck of a shot to win it. The next year we got Arizona down by one point and the guy hits an off-balance shot. It just happens. I remember Big Country beat Missouri one time on a shot that he couldn't hit if he shot it 100 times. But he hit it to put it into overtime and we ended up beating the Tigers in OT.

**JE:** So when you won that way, did you think you were lucky? But then again you put yourself in that position to win or lose like that, so...

**ES:** Yes, but sometimes it's difficult to accept losses when you know that you probably should

have won the game.

**JE:** Players are really dejected when that happens. You had a number of these moments when you would lose in the last second. What did you tell those players?

**ES:** Well, we won as many games and we lost that way. You know, as long as you have prepared and you have done everything that you possibly could do, and you go out there and you give everything you can possibly give and you know the coaches have done that too, then you accept the loss. That's athletics. That's the game.

**JE:** You finished your career at OSU as the second-winningest coach in OSU's history, behind only your mentor Henry Iba.

**ES:** That is exactly right.

## Chapter 20—5:00

### OSU Plane Crash

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**John Erling:** On January 27, 2001, one of three planes carrying Oklahoma State staff and players crashed in a snowstorm near Byers, Colorado—killing all 10 people on board. The plane was on its way back to Oklahoma following a loss to the University of Colorado. For the record, I will name them here. Those killed include: Nate Fleming, redshirt freshman guard; Dan Lawson, a junior guard; Bill Teegins, a sportscaster of OSU basketball and sports anchor on CBS affiliate Channel 9 in Kansas City; Kendall Durfey, a radio engineer; Will Hancock, media relations coordinator; Pat Noyes, director of basketball operations; Brian Luinstra, athletic trainer; Jared Weiberg, student assistant; Denver Mills who was a pilot; and Bjorn Fahlstrom was a co-pilot. Can you take us on a timeline of the events after the game in Colorado? Three planes were set to take everyone home.

**Eddie Sutton:** The plane that went down, the pilot was one that I had flown with and in that airplane more times than anyone else. Through the years, I have flown in more private aircraft than I have commercial aircraft. If I know the makeup of the plane and who the pilot is, I feel more secure getting in a private aircraft than I do getting in a commercial airplane. This pilot was so careful. There were so many times when he said, "The weather's not right, let's not fly." I would take his word for it. We all went out there and it was spitting a little snow, though we had checked the weather reports and everyone said it was okay. So they took off ahead of us, and then the other two planes took off. When I got back, their plane hadn't landed in Stillwater. So, they told me when we landed that the plane had returned to the base because there was some mechanical problem. Finally, after about an hour, word

came back that the plane had crashed and there were no survivors. It was probably the most tragic experience that I had ever encountered. All of us that were back were there in my office. Maybe the toughest thing that I ever had to do was to call the parents and the wives of the people that died in the crash, and tell them what happened.

**JE:** Did you call all 10 of them?

**ES:** I didn't call all 10 of them, but I made several calls. It's something that I will always live with. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about one of those guys. I wear a little pin on my jacket, just as a reminder. It's a pin that says "Ten". Ten wonderful people, they were great human beings. No one ever knows why something like that happens. It was proven that the airplane had mechanical problems and it just went down. I know that pilot and if there was any way to save that plane, he would've done it. I always had great trust and confidence in him. I think all of us try to remember them and honor them at least once a year. They have a run there in Stillwater where all the people come out and they try to raise as much money as they can for the counseling department. The counselors certainly helped their teammates, the coaching staff and other people after this accident happened. There's a monument inside of Gallagher-Iba Arena and there's one out there at the crash site. But the one inside the Gallagher-Iba Arena, when I'm there I go by and I look at all those pictures on the wall. It reminds me of some of the great times we had together, and what a loss it really was for all of us—the team and certainly the University. I am happy that we are still able to go back and honor those guys because they were really wonderful people.

**JE:** Did everybody get on the same plane they arrived on? Or were there last-minute changes?

**ES:** No, we changed people around, but we did that many times when we were on trips. For one thing, we switched the coaches around so we could get back and look at some tapes when we got back. That happened, and there were some people that questioned that, but we had done that many, many times on our road trips.

**JE:** It had to be tough. You attended many funerals didn't you?

**ES:** I didn't attend them all, but I did some. They had a big memorial service for all of them in Gallagher-Iba Arena. The place was packed. There were representatives from all of the schools in the Big 12. I had to get up and say a few words. It was a real tragedy for all of those kids.

**JE:** Obviously, it was the toughest time of your entire coaching career?

**ES:** Well, what I have said at coaching clinics is that all of us face adversity at times when you are coaching, but I hope nothing like that ever happens again for any of my friends that are coaching. You know, that's the biggest tragedy that there has ever been in basketball. There have been some airplane tragedies in football. Marshall, several years ago had a whole plane go down. The same thing happened in Wichita—they had a plane go down many years ago.

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**Chapter 21—1:38****Gallagher-Iba Expansion**

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**John Erling:** As a result of you being at OSU, they completed the \$55 million expansion of Gallagher-Iba Arena. Rather than build a new off-campus arena, the decision was made to expand the arena, doubling its original capacity. The old sight lines and the original maple floor were kept. It remains the oldest original basketball court floor still in use. Then they officially named the floor Eddie Sutton Court.

**Eddie Sutton:** That was quite an honor for me to accept. There's no doubt that the young men, the assistant coaches and all of us were able to restore the great tradition of OSU basketball. I certainly didn't do it by myself. I think when they put my name on that floor it represented all of the players and the coaches that had been a part of making it all happen. When they decided to build a new arena, I really fought hard to keep the arena where it was. Once the architects proved that they could renovate it and it would still have that same feeling that we had in the old arena. The fact that it was located right in the middle of campus I thought was so important, because most places, when they build new arenas, they are out in the country somewhere. If we were to build a new one, they were going to put it way out west of town somewhere. I thought that would be very inconvenient for the students. They way that it is now, students can walk to the games. It turned out that it's just as great of a home court advantage as it was when it was just the original arena. When we really had it going there, it was recognized as one of the two or three toughest places in college basketball for the visiting team to win.

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**Chapter 22—1:09****800 Wins**

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**John Erling:** So when you left you had a few games left to win to reach that 800 pinnacle.

**Eddie Sutton:** I never would have gone any place else. I was happy in retirement. I always had a goal of winning 800 games. When we got up in the high 70s, we passed Mr. Iba and I wanted to win 800. When I retired from OSU I didn't think that would ever happen. It wasn't that big of a deal. Then the athletic director called me from The University of San Francisco. He said they were going to have to make a change and let a coach go. He

asked me if I would come out and finish out the season. I thought about it and my son encouraged me to do it. I ended up going out there and coaching the San Francisco Dons for the last half of the season. I won enough games to win over 800.

**JE:** That's got to make you feel good to this day that you went after it.

**ES:** There are not many guys that win 800 games. I think there are 6 or 7 other people, but not very many. I had a lot of fun in San Francisco. It's a great city and a great school. They just didn't have very good players. Like Governor Chandler said to me, "We have more donkeys than we have thoroughbreds."

## Chapter 23—1:43

### Names You Know

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**John Erling:** Some names here, Abe Lemons, coach at the University of Texas. You had the Eddie and Abe TV show produced by Nike in the late 1970s.

**Eddie Sutton:** Abe was one of the cleverest people with words of all the coaches I have ever known. He was a lot better coach than he was given credit for. I mean everybody thought he was a comedian, but the guy could coach.

**JE:** Jerry Jones the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, you got to know him?

**ES:** Jerry is a dear friend. He was one of my biggest supporters in Arkansas. He and Gene and Patsy and myself used to take summer vacations together. I'm pleased that he has been so successful with the Dallas Cowboys.

**JE:** Jimmy Johnson?

**ES:** Jimmy Johnson was the assistant coach for Frank Broyles at Arkansas when I was coaching the Razorbacks. Jimmy and I became dear friends. We had some great times together. Of course, he later went on to coach OSU. But he also coached the Dallas Cowboys and he became a great college coach when Miami won the National Title and then he won a World Championship with the Cowboys.

**JE:** Other names people might know? Waylon Jennings?

**ES:** Waylon Jennings and his wife Jessi Colter were dear friends. We met them in Kentucky. Patsy and I had some good times with them. We used to follow The Highwaymen around, Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson had a group called The Highwaymen. That was a lot of fun because I like country music.

**JE:** What about the actor Bill Murray?

**ES:** Bill Murray I don't know real well. I met him in New York City. We had dinner together one

evening after a show. He is just as funny in person as he is in the movies.

**JE:** Actor Tim Robbins?

**ES:** Tim Robbins we got to know when we were in the NCAA Tournament back in the Meadowlands when we had the team and we went to the Final 4 in 2004. We got him some tickets to the Final 4. He's a great actor.

## Chapter 24–3:36

### Fan Comparison

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**John Erling:** These basketball programs where you have been. Was Kentucky the most intense as far as fans go? Was it more intense than Arkansas and Oklahoma?

**Eddie Sutton:** I don't think so. I think the fans in Arkansas and Oklahoma State were just as intense. Like I said earlier, 99% of the fans in Kentucky were just like the razorback fans or the Cowboy fans. There's just that 1% that I'm not sure they didn't think life was more important about the Cats than it was about their spiritual beliefs.

**JE:** Tubby Smith went to Kentucky and you knew him before?

**ES:** Tubby was at The University of Tulsa. Tubby called me when he was coaching at the University of Georgia after he'd left Tulsa. He asked me what I thought. I told him it was a tough decision. I said, "There are some of the best things that a coach would ever want at Kentucky, but there are some drawbacks. You'll have to make that decision." I think he lasted about 9 or 10 years. Now he's at the University of Minnesota, but he kind of felt the same way I did. There are some real pluses there but are some disadvantages as well.

**JE:** What is it about you or your personality that made you become a success? There are hundreds of coaches and people who want to be in coaching, but they just don't make it in the big time. Are you able to look at yourself and say, I think it's because I did this or I had that? There is something in you that put you in the elite.

**ES:** I had a sound philosophy thanks to Mr. Iba and I borrowed some things along the way from some other coaches. I had outstanding assistant coaches and I had some outstanding players. The one thing I think probably helped in my relationship with my players is that I told all of my assistants that we want to treat our players just like they were our own children. I think our players knew that we were always behind them. We wanted them to be the best player that they could be. We urged them to listen and to develop their God-given talent. But we were also behind them 100% whether it was in helping them get their degree or helping them with personal problems. Letting them know we dearly loved them

as people and not just players. We would help them in any way that we could. I think that probably helped in my relationships with all of the assistant coaches that I had. I told all of my assistant coaches the same thing. I told them I would try to teach them everything and when they got ready to get a head coaching position that I would do everything in the world to help them get it. I think I had 13 or 14 guys go on to be head coaches. So I think those are things that helped. The one thing that helped me more than anything, because it kept my perspective probably the way it should be, was my wife Patsy of 52 years. I think she was probably the best assistant coach I've ever had.

**JE:** We should mention your children from that marriage.

**ES:** We were very fortunate to have three wonderful sons. Steve is our oldest. He was the only smart one—he didn't go into coaching, he went into banking. Then Sean and then Scott who both certainly became outstanding basketball coaches.

**JE:** There had to be some great bonding between you all.

**ES:** Sean and I had some great fun and Scott played with us for a couple of years. Sean was with me all of those years. Then he went with Rob Evans as the assistant coach at the University of Mississippi when Rob left Oklahoma State as an assistant and got the head coach job at Ole Miss. Then Sean came back. Out of the 14 years I was there, he was with me 13 years as an assistant coach.

## Chapter 25—2:47

### Advice to Students

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**John Erling:** I have two questions for you. How would you like to be remembered? The next question is, what advice do you have to give to students or athletes or those who want to become coaches? Do you have some parting words for our listeners?

**Eddie Sutton:** The one thing that I have always tried to impress upon players is that God has given you so much talent, or your parents or the genes that you have, have given you so much talent. If you can go out and develop those God-given talents to the fullest, then you probably are going to feel good about yourself knowing that you are an overachiever in a sense. I also tell all of them that there is nothing easy in being a success. It takes a lot of hard work. There are a lot of people that have dreams of going to the top and winning championships regardless of whether it's athletics or the business that you are in. But there's not an easy way to get there. You have to be willing to pay the price to do that. There are too many people who aren't willing to make the personal sacrifices to make

that happen.

**JE:** Did you ever meet players who you knew were talented and may have been more talented than people that you coached, but they didn't work and their talent went unused?

**ES:** I have had a lot of players that didn't achieve the height of success that they could have because they were lazy or they didn't take advantage of the opportunity to listen to coaches and do the things that they should have done. They would rather be out doing something else. But I have had a lot of overachievers too. I think those are the guys that you point to with pride and know that they gave everything that they could. I've seen a lot of guys that were overachievers as players and they have gone on to do well in the business community.

**JE:** Is that how you would like to be remembered? That you were able to help these people move on in life?

**ES:** I think that's the only reason I stayed in coaching. People ask me all the time if I miss coaching. I don't miss the games. I miss the fellowship one has with his assistant coaches and the players and watching your players grow and mature as people and as players. I miss that daily association that I had in coaching. I think the one thing that we always tried to impress was that in some way the relationship you had with your players, you helped them certainly become better players, but you also hoped you helped them in some way to become a better person.

**JE:** Yes. Thank you for this time that we have spent together. I appreciate your time very much Eddie. Thank you.

**ES:** You're welcome John.

## Chapter 26—0:28

### Conclusion

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**Announcer:** You have just heard Coach Eddie Sutton tell you his life story, which includes life on a Kansas farm and his journey to a National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame. Consult the For Further Reading section of our website to learn more about Coach Sutton. Thank you for listening. We invite you to share this interview with your friends. This oral history website is made possible through the generous donations of the sponsors of [VoicesofOklahoma.com](http://VoicesofOklahoma.com).