

Ted Owens

With nine Big Eight tournament titles, he's widely recognized as one of the top collegiate coaches in the country.

Chapter 01 - 1:44

Introduction

Announcer: From surviving the Great Depression and Dust Bowl eras to driving a Model A Ford, hearing and watching news footage of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and serving in the Korean War, Ted Owens' life is full of stories in and out of sports.

In 1956 Ted Owens got his start in coaching basketball at Cameron Junior College, in Lawton, Oklahoma, where he even helped lead the baseball program to a national title in 1958.

Ted Owens guided the University of Kansas basketball team to six Big Eight conference championships and seven times to the NCAA Tournament. He was also a five-time Big Eight Coach of the Year and 1978 national coach of the year. Under Owens, the Jayhawks reached the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16 five times and the Elite Eight three times. His 1971 team was the first undefeated team in Big-8 history (14-0), winning both conference and tournament titles, and finished with an overall record of 27-3. Owens finished his career at Kansas with nine Big Eight Tournament titles.

Listen to Ted talk about picking cotton, the dust bowl days, his service in Korea and of course his 19 years as coach of the Kansas Jayhawks. Ted's story is heard on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 7:50

Dust Bowl Days

John Erling: My name is John Erling and today's date is May 12th, 2016. Ted, would you state your full name, your date of birth, and your age?

Ted Owens: Ted Owens. My birthday is July 16th of 1929. I'm eighty-six. I'll be eighty-seven in a couple of months.

JE: You didn't give a second name.

TO: Teddy Lynn Owens. You know, when you grow up in Southwest Oklahoma you have double names. My name was Teddy Lynn. My brother's name was Freddy Gene.
(Laughter)

JE: All right, we're recording this interview here in the facilities of Voicesofoklahoma.com. Where were you born?

TO: Born in Hollis, Oklahoma on our cotton farm about three mile north of Hollis.

JE: Your mother's name?

TO: Annie.

JE: Tell me about her: her personality. What was she like?

TO: Well, she was Annie Abernathy. She met my dad, Homer Owens, in elementary school. They only graduated from the seventh grade. Which, back in those days, was pretty good education. Even though they didn't have a great academic education, they were much wiser than almost anyone that I've ever known. She was a wonderful, sweet, I called her a "saintly," lady. She taught a Sunday school class at the Antioch Baptist Church. She was just sweet, caring - She lived her whole life just to service three boys and my dad.

JE: Your father: his personality. What was he like?

TO: Well, he was a manly guy. He was a guy that wasn't a hugger and kisser or anything. He'd give ya a firm handshake, and it wasn't until he was in his eighties and we'd go back, that we'd hug each other. He was a disciplined man, a very hard worker, and he had incredible faith. He and Mother just believed if we'd do our jobs and work hard that, no matter what happens in your lifetime, that things will work out.

We lived on that cotton farm, back in South West Oklahoma, during the Dust Bowl Days and the Great Depression. Black clouds would come in from Kansas. We'd see those black clouds coming in and Mother would go out to the North Side of the House, we called them "Northers," she would tack plastic on the outside windows to keep the sand out of the house. But, in spite of that, the wind was so strong; it would come through and raise the linoleum up off of the floor.

Many times it would blow our crops out, and Dad didn't whimper, didn't whine, he just said, "Boys, we've got to replant the cotton." He just was incredibly resilient. He set a great example for me in life, and if things don't go well, then you just work it out.

JE: Was that the main crop, cotton?

TO: Cotton. We did grow some wheat, but mostly cotton.

JE: Did you learn how to pick cotton?

TO: Oh yeah, unfortunately. In fact, my three brothers and I would pull cotton along with our fellow field workers. We had two wagons. We would fill one wagon, Dad would take it to the gin while we filled the other, then he would come back from the gin with the expectation that we'd have that filled and he would go back again.

So, at the end of the day, my dad, like any good coach, would try to motivate us to get another wagonload. He'd get his sack out of the pickup and he'd say, "Come on, boys. Let's see if you can beat old Dad." We'd be dead tired and a little bit annoyed at hearing this, but our competitive instincts would kick in and we'd take off and try to beat old Dad. We'd be ahead of him and we'd say, "Looks like we got you this time, Dad," and he said, "It's not what you have now. It's what you have at the hang-up," when you'd hang your sack and weigh it on the wagon at the end. "It's what you have at the hang-up that counts."

So, during the course of my life I'd look back at those days, and no matter whether you're successful or whether you're going through discouraging times, just keep your focus on your ultimate goals and purposes. It's what you have at the hang-up that counts, and that's what I wrote the book about.

JE: And that's the title of your book, "At the Hang-Up."

TO: That's right.

JE: But the Dust Bowl, you'd have to go outside and you'd have to wear something over your face?

TO: Yeah, we'd wear bandannas, almost like the old western bandits would. Otherwise you'd get dust pneumonia during those times and it'd just choke you. We had no plumbing in the house. We had no heat in our bedrooms. We had an outhouse. We would have water hauled from the town and put in our cistern. We would take baths during the week and my job as the youngest of the boys was to keep the house trough clean so we could take a bath.

JE: In the horse trough?

TO: So, in the horse trough, yeah. We had a windmill that pumped chip water, and you couldn't drink it, but you could take a bath in it.

JE: And that was pretty cold too, wasn't it?

TO: Yeah, oh, it was very cold! And it led to pretty quick baths as you can imagine. But on Saturday we would work until noontime, and Mother would have our number two washtub full of water and she would have it outside heating in the sun and everyone in the family would take a bath. Dad would take a bath first, Mother, brother Quentin, brother Fred, then I was always the last.

JE: In the same water?

TO: Yeah, and you know, the expression of "Don't throw the baby out." That came from that. It was so gritty by that time, you could get lost in the water.

JE: You didn't have electricity either, did you?

TO: No, no electricity. We had kerosene lamps.

JE: These cold Oklahoma winters had to be pretty miserable at times.

TO: Well, what Mother would do: we had a coal stove in the living room, and then we had a kitchen stove, but no heat in the bedroom. The three brothers slept in the same little bedroom. The other bedroom Mother and Dad slept in. Mother would put bricks on the coal stove, heat the bricks, and then wrap them in towels and put them at the foot of the bed. Back in those days the ladies made quilts all the time, the old time quilting parties and so forth, so we had an abundance of quilts. We would just stack quilts very high and then put our feet against the warm bricks and that's how we stayed warm.

JE: And you didn't know any different, right?

TO: No. You know, John Steinbeck wrote about those days of the Okies, and all of that. We knew he had written a book, we just didn't know he was writing about us at the time, 'cause everyone else, all of our neighbors, had the same circumstances we did.

JE: Let's name your two brothers again.

TO: Quentin and Fred. Quentin spent his life in the schools. He was a school superintendent, and he had a heart attack at the age of forty-two and we lost him. And then brother Fred was seventy-two, he had Alzheimer's, and we lost him. So, all of my folks are gone.

JE: And here you look to be in remarkable condition, I've got to say. Nobody would guess you to be eighty-seven years old.

TO: Yeah, well Dad lived to be ninety and Mother lived to be ninety-five, so I did inherit some pretty good genes.

JE: Okay, right. 1929, in October, the Stock Market crashed and that's the year you were born. Then we have the Depression, ends in 1932. You've already talked about the Dust Bowl, then you were six and seven years old. Do you remember because of the Depression that people would come to ask for help or handouts?

TO: We lived right along a state road. Our house was twenty yards from a state road. People hitchhiked through the country, you know, looking for jobs, looking for food and so forth. If anybody was hungry, and they'd stop by our house, Mother would always bring food or drink out of the porch, and they'd sit there and have food and then they'd go on their way.

JE: Mhm.

TO: People knew that to survive that we had to help one another. Indeed, the biblical talk about loving your neighbors and so forth was very important to us.

JE: Mhm.

Chapter 03 - 8:00**December 7, 1941**

John Erling: Your first school that you attended, the elementary school that you attended...

Ted Owens: Yeah.

JE: What was that?

TO: A little country school, Arnett. Back in those days you had a lot of consolidated schools. In Harmon County, our county, alone, you had eight consolidated schools. Now they don't have any. It's just Hollis. The town school is the only school. We attended that school and it was built during Roosevelt's time. The WPA, and, the Works Project Administration, and the CCC, built schools and roads. So, this school was built by the Works Project Administration.

We attended school there. It was mostly a farming community. We did that until the war came. In 1941, Dad and I had driven down to town, we lived about three miles from Hollis, and someone came over and said, "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor."

JE: That was December 7th, 1941.

TO: Yeah, that's right. We'd never heard of Pearl Harbor and we just didn't get the impact of all of it until the next day, I believe it was, that Franklin Roosevelt then spoke to Congress and declared war. But, we knew the impact quickly because all of our older friends, I was in the ninth grade at the time...

JE: You were about twelve years old then, I guess.

TO: Yeah, so my brother, Quentin, went into the Air Force. Well, it was the Army Air Corps back then, and he was a pilot for a long time, but he had some problems in some higher altitudes and would get disoriented and that sort of thing and so they assigned him to the military police. He served in the Pacific with the military police.

My brother Fred and I worked on the farm. One day a knock came on the door. This tall, gangly man said, "Homer and Annie, my name is Joe Bailey Metcalf." He said, "I'm the Junior High Principal and the Basketball Coach at Hollis." We understand that there are not enough male athletes left at Arnett School to have a team. We know the boys are good basketball players and good baseball players. We'd like for them to come to Hollis to school. And he said, "I've talked to the Arnett School Board and sent since your land borders right on the Hollis District, they've allowed us, with your permission, to transfer five acres of land, where your house is, into the Hollis District."

JE: So, is that one of your first recruiting jobs? (laughter)

TO: It was (laughter) and it goes beyond that. We said, "Coach, we don't have any way to get to town. We only have one vehicle, and we can't get to town." He said, "I've taken care of that. He said, "Freddy, you're going to drive a bus route." So, our bus route was to drive

straight into Hollis. Pick up the Curry girls on the way, and go into Hollis. Then we would work out after school. The janitor, Chess Meeks, would take the girls home and we had a bus to drive home after...

JE: So you had your own bus transportation?

TO: Yeah, we had our own bus transportation. And he also said, "We know the boys are good basketball and baseball players," but he said, "We're really short of man-power and we want 'em to play Football." We said, "Coach, we just have two problems: We've never played Football, and we've never seen a Football game." So, that led to quite an adventure.

JE: Then you are how old when he's coming to your door?

TO: Well, it would have been about fifteen, I guess.

JE: And your brother was two years older than you?

TO: Yeah.

JE: When were you first introduced to basketball and thinking that you would like it?

TO: My dad was an enormous worker. We would come in from school and he would come in from the fields. Most of the time we worked horses and mules, later he was able to get a tractor. But, he would come in after a full day of working, and during baseball season he'd get his bat out. He would hit us fly balls and grounders, he called them "skinnners."

And then in basketball he built a basketball goal. He just put up a steel pole and tacked the backboard against it, so there was no margin. I mean, when you laid the ball in, you could hit the steel pole. We couldn't even afford a net. So, it led to big arguments whether the ball really went through the rim or not. They had no money, but whatever they had, we could play sports. We could take advantage of their school activities.

JE: He hadn't been athletic himself, had he?

TO: Yeah, he had played basketball and he had played baseball. As a matter of fact, he used to say that if he had not pitched on a real cold day and ruined his arm, he said, "I think I could have made the big show." And so, for years we truly believed that Dad would have been in the big show. (laughter)

JE: Maybe, maybe so. (laughter) Maybe he could have. So then it was early on, and you must think about that, a father who really encouraged you guys to play sports of any sort and he had no idea he was talking to pretty good talent.

TO: Yeah, at Christmas time, we were so poor that we generally didn't each of us get a gift. Sometimes we would get a gift for all three boys. And one Christmas he gave us a basketball. It's the old kind that had the lace in it and a bladder to hold the air. That was our Christmas present and so when I was five years old, my brothers were at the school and I had slipped under the bed and got the basketball out before they came home and I went out to the goal and I got it between my legs, lifted it up, and made a basket. That's when I fell in love with the game of basketball.

- JE:** Five years old?
- TO:** Five years old, yeah.
- JE:** Yeah, was that a one-room schoolhouse?
- TO:** No, it had more than that. Pretty much elementary was together and then junior high and high school together.
- JE:** Tell me about during the war, rationing and all. Do you recall things hard to get?
- TO:** Oh yeah, yeah. We were pretty fortunate. When you're on a farm, even though you didn't have any money, we ate well. We raised our own vegetables and fruits. We slaughtered our own hogs and cows and chickens. So, we did not suffer from the food rationing very much. The town's people did more than we did. But my dad at that time was a smoker. He knew that on Sunday, the distributors would come into town to drop off the cigarettes and so forth, so he was always there on Sunday to get his rationing of cigarettes. I think he was a Lucky Strike smoker.
- JE:** But, that was a rationing item.
- TO:** Yeah, and then gas, you had A, B, and C stickers. C stickers was just a normal person. A B sticker was for farmers and then a C sticker was for truckers.
- JE:** That determined the amount of gasoline you could buy?
- TO:** Yeah, and we had a B sticker so we could farm.
- JE:** What about tires and those kinds of things?
- TO:** I think it was pretty hard to come by. I know that my uncle and I tried to drive out to our cousin's out near Lubbock, Texas, which is about a three-hour drive, I guess. Back then it was a four hour drive, but I remember that we blew out our tires about three or four times. So that's how bad the tires were.
- JE:** What were the first cars you remember?
- TO:** Well, we had a Model A Ford. Just before that we had a Model T. As a matter of fact, my dad and mother were married in the backseat of a Model T Ford. They and their friends, who accompanied them, pulled up to their preacher's house. He came out. He sat in the backseat of the car and they were nineteen and sixteen.
- JE:** Literally in the backseat?
- TO:** They didn't get out. They just sat there and were married. You know, they say, "Young marriages don't work out." Well, it worked out for them. They were married seventy years.

Chapter 04 - 9:00**Joe Bailey Metcalf**

John Erling: You go to school, and Joe Bailey Metcalf is your coach. How does that experience work for you?

Ted Owens: Well, it was incredible. It opened doors for me that I couldn't have imagined. I, of course, played basketball and baseball and learned the game of football. We had some bumps along the road. For instance, if you've ever seen the hip pads: in the back of the hip pads you have a little partition that goes down to protect your tail bone. Well, the players knew these country boys, and so they told us that you put them on backwards, that it was to protect your private parts. So, I, we found it pretty hard to run. (laughter) But they had a big laugh out of it.

Then we go over to Lawton to play. I didn't know the rules very well and I was an end. So, I went down on the punt and he kicked a fairly short punt and it was coming right over my head and I just reached up and caught it, sidestepped the guy trying to catch the punt. I thought I was off for my first touchdown. And of course the officials whistled it and stepped off a penalty.

JE: Because?

TO: Because it was illegal. I couldn't catch the ball first.

JE: From your own team member?

TO: Yeah, which was right in front of the Lawton bench and I looked over and their coach doubled over laughing. I looked over at our coach, Joe Bailey, and he didn't think it was quite as funny. So, I gradually learned the game.

We were good in all sports. We had some gifted athletes. Leon Heath went on to become the great running back at Oklahoma. "Mule Train" they called him back in those days. J.W. Cole was the starting tackle at OU. In fact, when I went to OU, four of their starters on offense or defense were from Hollis. Darrell Royal, Leon Manley, and then Leon Heath, and J.W. Cole. In fact, Bud Wilkinson, who had just taken over as head coach, he said, "If all the towns in Oklahoma produced like Hollis did...", It was a great time.

JE: So, what year did you graduate from high school?

TO: In 1947. When we were at the state tournament, we were defeated in the semi-finals at the state tournament and Henry Iba of Oklahoma A&M came into the dressing room after the game and told coach Metcalf, he said, "I really like the Owens boy, and you tell him that I'll be in touch with him." Well, I went to the mailbox on our farm every day to get a letter from Henry Iba and never heard from him. When I became a coach, you know, I realized that he probably found someone that he liked better, and that just happens in recruiting, but it broke my heart that I didn't hear.

And so, here I am in my senior year not knowing for sure whether I'm going to be able to college. One day Coach Metcalf said, "Ted, Bill Jennings, Oklahoma Chief Recruiter, is coming to town to visit with J.W. and Leon. I want you in that meeting." So, we go in the meeting. Bill gives a pitch about the great young coach Bud Wilkinson's taking over. So, at the end of his presentation he said, "Do you have any questions?" And Coach Metcalf said, "Well, Bill, we like what you have to say, but," he said, "those three boys are inseparable and they want to go to school together." Well, we'd never talked about going to school together, but we were great friends. And he said, "Oklahoma A&M has offered all three of them." They'd forgotten to tell me if they had but Bill says, "Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll give Leon and J.W. full scholarships and we'll pay the Owens boy's books and tuition and we'll get him a couple of jobs so he can pay for his room and board." He said, "He'll be a student fireman out at the south base," the old naval base at OU, "that'll give him a place to live. I'll get him a job at O.T. McCall's supermarket downtown and he can deliver groceries and make enough to pay for the training table."

I thought it was a great deal. I'd worked all my life. You tell people you had two jobs, you know, now, and they know how awful that was, but it wasn't any big deal.

We go up for orientation. We walked by the old field house and I said, "I want to in and see where they play basketball." So, I go in and there's a ball out on the court. I go over and pick up the ball and start shooting my two-handed set shot, and I can shoot it. A man came out of his office and hollered. I thought, oh boy, I'm in trouble. It was "Shocky" Needy, the assistant basketball coach.

JE: Shocky Needy?

TO: Shocky Needy.

JE: All right.

TO: He said, "We saw you play in the state tournament and we liked you."

Apparently he didn't like me enough to contact me, but he said, "We sure hope you come out for basketball." And I told him the deal I had with football, and I said, "I'm a better basketball player than I am football, but I'm obligated to football." He said, "What if we paid your books and tuition and we talked to football about your playing basketball." I said, "Well, that's fine with me, but, you know, I'm obligated to them."

So, they talked to football, and as I say it, it would make a better story to say that football really tried hard to keep me but they had what they wanted in J.W. and Leon. So, that's how I ended up at the Oklahoma University with a chance to play basketball and all because I had a high school coach who cared enough about me to want me to have a future.

JE: More about Bud Wilkinson. You never did go out to play football, then?

TO: No, but I stayed very close. After a year at the fire station, I earned a scholarship my sophomore year in basketball, so we all stayed at the old Jefferson House. The athletic department was very close-knit back then and my best friends were the football players.

On Sunday, they would review the film of Saturday's game up in the top floor of Jefferson house. I would go up and watch it and Coach Wilkinson and all of them were always very nice to allow me to be there. So, I grew up almost as much an Oklahoma football fan as I did basketball.

JE: Talk about Bud Wilkinson then, how you observed him and how he was.

TO: Well, I was very, very lucky. I played for a hall of fame basketball coach in Bruce Drake. But, at the same time, Bud Wilkinson was the head football coach; Port Robertson, a hall of fame wrestling coach; Jack Baer, great baseball coach. They all won national championships while I was in school. So, I had the opportunity to really be around some great coaches.

First of all, Bud was handsome, I mean if you ordered him out of a Sears Roebuck Catalog, it would look exactly like Bud Wilkinson: tall, handsome, articulate. In fact, the players called him "The Great White Father."

JE: He had a certain demeanor about him, right?

TO: He did. A lot of his sayings I still use and used as a coach. Along with Coach Drake and the things that he did, but those coaches had a difficult time in those days.

They had to take these army veterans who were just come back from the war and take kids that were right out of high school. You almost had two rules: You couldn't squeeze these veterans too tight. You had to give them a lot of freedom, but at the same time, you had to have some discipline for your young high school guys coming out. So, It was a challenge for a coach.

But Bud handled it very well. He really won the respect from those guys. They really bought into what he had to say. For instance, he would always say: "The will to win is nothing unless you have the will to prepare." He'd always remind them of how important at practice preparation was.

JE: With your four years there, he started then winning? He didn't win immediately, did he?

TO: No, he lost two and tied one at the beginning of his first year, and the natives were restless. They thought, hey, have we made a mistake with this guy? Then they won the conference after that. But then they started off the next year with very high expectations and they lost out at Santa Clara. People again, they were starting to worry. Then they won all thirty-something in a row.

JE: He came as an assistant from Minnesota, had never been a head football coach...

TO: No, but they had been in the service together. Jim Tatum, Missouri football, Don Faurot, Bud Wilkinson, Gomer Jones, all of them had been in the service together. And they'd coached service football and they knew every great football player and that's how we were able to get a lot of football players after the war, because Jim Tatum came as head coach and Bud as his assistant. They brought in a lot of great football players.

Chapter 05 - 4:55**The Gambler**

John Erling: Your basketball career then at OU, talk to us about it.

Ted Owens: Well, the year before started there, Oklahoma had been to the national finals in 1947 with Gerald Tucker and Allie Paine, and Coach Drake had had a great team. They lost to Holy Cross in the national finals in Madison Square Garden, so there's great interest in basketball there.

It only seated five thousand. We had such interest that on student tickets, you had A and B tickets; you couldn't get in every game. You had to alternate. So people really hustled to get in. We had packed arenas and a lot of those veterans were still there. In fact, it wasn't until my senior year that the veterans were gone. When you're an eighteen or nineteen year old guy trying to beat out a twenty-four year old veteran, who happened to be pretty good players too... So, I didn't play a lot until my senior year, and then won a starting position my senior year.

JE: Your position?

TO: Guard. I had a good year my senior year. I averaged eleven or twelve points a game. Now, that doesn't seem like much today, but won a lot of games in the forty points. I had a really satisfying career, and the fact that I was a non-starter, I had to be on the bench a lot, then I was a part-time starter, then I was a starter. As a coach, it was great preparation because it helped me to understand how those guys feel. I was very fortunate.

JE: Wasn't there a gambler who made his presence known?

TO: Yes.

JE: Tell us about that.

TO: During the summer, I would go back and work on the farm. My dad would give me thirteen acres of land. If I would help him with his farm, he would give me this patch from whatever it produced; that was my earnings that I could take back supplement my schooling. So, I had to go back in the summer and I would play semi-pro baseball. Well, one year Coach Drake said, "I want you seniors to go back and play in the Catskills. Back then, summer basketball, all the great college players went back and played in the Catskills.

JE: The Catskills were, where were they?

TO: Back in the mountains in the east. To entertain the guests at the resorts they would have outdoor basketball. It was a big deal back then. So, I was invited and two or three of my teammates were invited to go back and work in the resorts. We'd be busboys or whatever during the day and then at night we would play and entertain the guests. But, I couldn't go.

My teammates, Mark Freiburger, and Jim Terrell, and Doug Lynn all went back east and so they came back and were telling about this guy they had met named Salvatore

Sollazzo. He, I believe, had a jewelry business in New York City. Every year we would go back and play in Madison Square Garden in December.

One year, while we were there, Sollazzo invited Mark and the boys who had played over to dinner at his apartment. Our best player was Mark Freiburger, 6'11". And he said, "Marcus, are you interested in making a little Christmas money?" Well, Mark didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

So, later that year, the headlines: Sollazzo has fixed all these games in New York. The City College of New York was the grand slam champion. They'd won NIT and the NCAA tournaments. You could do that in those days, and all over the country. All of a sudden, Kentucky, Bradley, Long Island, all these great players had been involved in fixing games. For the most part they hadn't thrown games, but they had tried to keep games under the point margin, the betting margin.

JE: How did they do that?

TO: Oh, a lot of ways: fumbling the ball out of bounds, fouling. So it was the saddest time in college basketball. Adolf Rupp said, "They can't touch my boys with a ten-foot pole." Then it comes out that some of his great players had been fixing games.

JE: Tell our listeners who Adolf Rupp was.

TO: At the University of Kentucky.

JE: Right.

TO: The great coach. Everybody was just stunned.

JE: And what year was that about?

TO: Season of 1950-'51. It just really harmed the credibility of the game.

JE: And then he was indicted.

TO: He was indicted, and I'm not sure what the sentence was. But, all of a sudden we realized how close that we were to this. I mean, I don't think our guys would have. They didn't even realize what he was talking about until they started thinking what he had said to Mark. "Mark, you want to earn a little Christmas money?"

JE: Do you know what he told Mark to do?

TO: Well, I guess Mark didn't respond so the conversation didn't continue.

Chapter 06 - 3:00

Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher

John Erling: Now when Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher was wanting to be the first African American law student at the University of Oklahoma, you were there on campus.

Ted Owens: Yes.

JE: Tell us what you saw, and felt, and remember of that?

TO: My experience with black people was working in the fields, in the cotton fields. We worked together and we played together and we were good friends. But, then when it was time for school, I went to my school, they went to theirs, and I have to be honest that at the time I didn't think that much about it. I just thought, well that's the way it is.

Then I go to the University of Oklahoma and you read the headlines. Oklahoma University at that time did not have a black undergraduate in the school. Back in the those days, if you were black and living in Oklahoma, you had to attend Langston University. Then if you wanted to go postgraduate, the Legislature appropriated funds to sent you out of state, but you couldn't go to graduate school.

I get to the University of Oklahoma and the papers, Daily Oklahoman, and then The Norman Transcript, and so forth were all about Ada Lois Sipuel.

Ada Lois Sipuel was from Chickasha. She had applied to the University of Oklahoma Law School and they had turned her down citing their states laws. She takes it all the way to the Supreme Court. Thurgood Marshall is her attorney. They give her an injunction which allows her to go to class to OU until the Supreme Court rules on it.

Out of curiosity one day, I said, "I'm going over to the Law School and see this Ada Lois Sipuel." I went over and looked in a classroom and there was Ada Lois in class separated by a rope barrier from her fellow students. That just had such an impact on me. Segregation just hit me right in the face.

A day or so later, I curiously went over and looked in another class and she was separated by a tri-fold dressing screen. Fortunately, after class was over, some of the students went over and visited with her so she would not feel unwelcome or uncomfortable, and also, George L. Cross, who was the President at OU, he had to abide by the state laws, but he kept encouraging her.

She won the Supreme Court case and graduated from the Law School there and one day became a regent on the Board of Regents. So, as Paul Harvey would say, "The rest of the story."

JE: Exactly. But, what an impact for you to actually see her sitting separated from everyone when she was just as smart, if not smarter than the rest of the class.

TO: I, I, I looked and said, "There is a fellow human being separated by barrier." It was the first real impact that I had.

JE: Well, its good that students of all ages, blacks and whites, know that that's the way it was.

TO: Yeah.

JE: And we still face racial discrimination to this very day.

Chapter 07 - 6:00**Korean War**

John Erling: You graduate then from OU?

Ted Owens: Graduated in '51, but I still had two courses to complete my ROTC commission, so Coach Drake said, "Our assistant, Shocky Needy, is a reserve officer and he's been called to Korea. Ted, why don't you stay on as my assistant?" In those days you only had one assistant. So, I stayed on for a year. Started work on my masters degree and finished my commission and then I went in to the army at Fort Sill and then on to Korea.

JE: You were shipped out to Korea?

TO: Right.

JE: In what year?

TO: '53.

JE: Who were you assigned to?

TO: I was assigned to the second division artillery. I was an artillery officer. They assigned me to the French Infantry. Back in those days, the United Nation's Forces, Thailand would send a unit, the French sent an infantry regiment, but didn't send any artillery support. So, we had to furnish the artillery support. So, I was a forward observer for the French Infantry for a while, and then when the ceasefire occurred at P'anmunjom, incidentally there's never been a peace treaty signed, the North Koreans and South Koreans are officially still at war, but anyway, when they sent the French to what was then French Indochina and later Vietnam, they were surrounded at Dien Bien Phu, if you happen to remember that history, and most of them were killed; the guys that I was with.

JE: And you'd bonded with these people.

TO: Yeah.

JE: These were your comrades and that had to be tough to hear that kind of news.

TO: Yeah, it was very difficult. They were great people. In the morning, the French would send up French loafs and omelets for us to eat. At noontime we ate sea rations and then at night, I would take the jeep with blackout lights, drive down this road that the engineers had built, with blackout lights, and I would eat with the French Infantry and their battalion. They knew how to fight a war. They would have a five-course meal. They would have a printed menu, and they would have me read in French. Can you imagine this Oklahoma nasal twang? (laughter) And that's how they would get their kicks every night of my trying to read the menu. Yeah, we became great friends.

JE: They had good food and you had sea rations.

TO: Yeah. (laughter)

JE: Tell us what kind of situations you found yourself in Korea.

TO: When I arrived, they were backing off. I was up overlooking the Hantan Valley. We lived in bunkers. The bunkers were made out of sandbags and 12x12s. You had a little opening that you looked out of with a BC scope, kind of like a periscope. You don't expose your head, but you're down below with this periscope type, called a BC scope. Your job was to constantly look over the front and pick up any movement. Then when the French left, I went back and my job was to train the recon sergeants and the new second lieutenants coming. I'd become a first lieutenant by that time. My job was to train them in adjusting artillery fire.

JE: It had to be, at times, terribly cold, there?

TO: Oh, bitterly cold. A lot of soldiers, to get out of the war, they would let their feet become frostbitten. They made that a court marshal offense. So, we had thermal boots, we called "Mickey Mouse Boots," and they looked like Mickey Mouse. If you kept your feet moving, up and down, all the time, then your feet would stay warm. Then you had big parkas, they're very well equipped. Contrary to years before that, we were so poorly equipped and we went up to the Yalu River, and the Chinese intervened and overran our troops. We weren't equipped at all for the wintertime, but by then we had really good equipment.

JE: Did you have any frostbite yourself?

TO: You know what, yes; but you didn't want to turn it in. Even today, my circulation in my toes is not normal. But I ruined my hearing, because I spent quite a bit of time as an executive officer at the battery where guns or howitzers were going off. So, you're taking commands from the fire directions center on the phone, so your ears aren't protected and you're relaying those to the guns, so the guns were booming and it's had an ill effect on my ears and in fact, that's why I wear hearing aides today.

JE: The soldiers who, on purpose, let their feet have frostbite, that could lead to amputation of their toes...?

TO: You know, I don't know. All I know is that when we arrived there, that was one of the things that they told us: "You are responsible not to get frostbite."

JE: Were you even in any life threatening situations?

TO: Not so much, because in artillery, we were backed off from the Hantan.

JE: How long were you in Korea?

TO: Almost a year. Then the Army, like what happens so many times, they wanted to reduce the amounts of troops and I actually came home, I was supposed to have a year's duty there, and had about nine months duty before we came home.

JE: So, that was a happy day to be discharged.

TO: Oh, you bet, discharged at Colorado Springs!

JE: Discharged in what year?

TO: '54, I guess.

JE: So, the war was winding down at that time?

TO: Yes. It was winding down some, yeah, it looked like they were not going to have any problem, but they didn't sign a peace treaty. That ceasefire at P'anmunjom was...

JE: Well, it's a good thing that ceasefire's held hasn't it?

TO: Yeah, oh yeah.

JE: Still, they still bicker and fight.

TO: Yeah.

JE: But, that ceasefire has held. You were never around General Eisenhower at that time?

TO: No, no.

JE: As he was so prominent?

TO: Yeah.

JE: And, as I recall, the 45th parallel, wasn't it?

TO: Yeah.

JE: That was the line of demarcation, I believe.

TO: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Were you near that?

TO: Well, yeah, we were right on it.

JE: Right there?

Chapter 08 - 6:35

Cameron College

John Erling: So, you come home, you're discharged, then what?

Ted Owens: Well, I had to decide what I wanted to do. I'd always thought I wanted to coach, but I thought I had some playing left in me. Problem is I'd picked up about twenty pounds. Back then you only had eight teams in the NBA. Then you had the National Industrial Basketball League, which we'd know very well. Phillips 66 was one of the great teams. The Akron Goodyear, Seattle Bakers, and I played for Houston. Our assistant coach at Oklahoma, Shocky Needy, had become the head coach of the Houston Oilers.

The Ada Oilers, who were owned by Bud Adams, who was the owner of the Houston Oilers football team, and then the Tennessee Titans. I went to work for them and played. You know, back then, with no television, the NBA didn't pay big money. Not that I had a chance. I would have played in the NBA if I had had that opportunity. But some of the guys, like Clyde Lovellette and Kurland, as an example...

JE: You're talking about Bob Kurland?

TO: Bod Kurland.

JE: Seven foot, for OSU.

TO: Yeah. Bob preferred to play in the NIBL so he'd have a job when he finished and went on to become vice president of Phillips and had a great career. I went to work for the Houston Ada Oilers. The "Ada" stands for "Adams." I played a year with them. I had an okay year, had some good games at the end, but it was time for me to quit playing and to get on with my life if I were going into coaching, and so I went back to OU to finish my masters.

I'd met a gentleman on one of my committees and he offered me the head basketball job at Southeast High School in Oklahoma City. I took it. This was in August, school was about to start, so I left Norman to drive to Hollis to pick up my clothes and then I was gonna go on to Oklahoma City.

When I stopped in Lawton to see an old army friend, he said, "Hey, the Camoran College job just opened." He said that Harvey Pate, the assistant coach, had taken a job at the University of Houston. I said, "You know, I know the athletic director, Leroy Montgomery." I had met him while I was in service there at Fort Sill. So I stopped by to see Leroy and I said, "Leroy, I understand you have a job opening. He said, "Yes, are you interested?" And I said, "Yeah, tell me about the job." He said, "Well, you'd be the head basketball coach. You'd be the assistant football coach." He said, "We haven't had a baseball program in twenty-seven years. I want to start one, because," he said, "there are a lot of people we recruit for football and basketball that want to play baseball. So we want you to start a baseball program. We think it will help with our recruiting. And then we want you to teach four classes of US History and we'll pay you forty-two hundred dollars a year."

JE: (laughter)

TO: So, I said, "Well, I've taken this job over in Oklahoma City, so I'll have to call his friend." I called Charles, and I said, "I've been offered this job at Cameron." He said, "You need to take it." He said, "The guy I fired is suing me to try to keep his job. You better take that job." So that's how I ended up at Cameron College.

JE: Cameron College, where is that?

TO: In Lawton. It's now Cameron University, but at that time it was a junior college.

JE: You were head basketball coach, how did your first year go?

TO: Good. We had a very good team, but we lost in the regional tournament. Ironically, we'd just opened the new gymnasium. We had an awful gym before then. They'd built one of the first buildings to have auditorium type seating. It was small. It was about 2,000, but really nice. So, we had beaten Murry State by twenty points in the regular season and they upset us in the regionals. So it was a really good year, but had a disappointing ending.

JE: The year now?

TO: That was in 1956-'57.

JE: Yeah, yeah, '57.

TO: I was only about twenty-six, twenty-seven years old at that time.

JE: So, you were about five, six years older than the people you're, you're...

TO: Yeah.

JE: That you were coaching?

TO: That I was coaching.

JE: In the fifties, of course, integration, desegregation in Oklahoma is very big. How did that affect the Cameron team?

TO: Well, we had one black player on the football team. We did not have any African Americans play basketball. And even then, the segregation and bias wasn't as great, but Native Americans suffered some from discrimination and so forth. Like I say, it wasn't to the degree of African Americans. It was an interesting time.

I had several Native Americans on my first team and then midway through that year I had a call from the University of Oklahoma. Norman Lamb was going to Law School, but he had graduated at Cameron. So, he said, "I want you to know about a young man, 6'7", named Homer Watkins." He had graduated from L'Ouverture High School in McAlester, and he was the first black player to be recruited for basketball at the University of Oklahoma. Norman said, "He needs some academic preparation and so forth, and what we would like to do is for you to take him for a couple of years, work on his academics and his skills, and then we'd get him back after that."

I hoped in the car and headed to Norman and met Homer. One of the dearest, sweetest spirited young men I've ever been around. He was incredible. I promised him, I said, "Homer, if you come to Cameron, I promise you two things: we'll get you prepared academically so you can be successful, and we'll continue to develop those skills so that you'll be ready to play at the major college level." He came to Cameron, laid out a semester, so he did not play in, erm, '56-'57 season. But the beginning of '57-'58, we had nearly all of our players back, plus Homer, so we were really ready to make a good run.

In 1957-'58, had the greatest year in probably Cameron sports history, we were undefeated in basketball, ranked number one in the country, but we finally lost in the national semi-finals. Which is a great disappointment.

Chapter 09 - 10:19
Great Baseball Story

Ted Owens: I really didn't want to have baseball because we didn't have baseball in the conference. We'd gone into a Texas conference called the Pioneer Conference. Besides that, they wanted to have a baseball program but we didn't have a baseball practice field, we didn't have uniforms. The guys had to play in blue jeans and sweatpants.

I had a friend out at Fort Sill name, named Jim Rinehart. When I started coaching there, I was making forty-two hundred a year. To supplement my income, I'd go out to Fort Sill at night and officiate their league games. They'd pay me ten dollars a game and I'd pick up maybe thirty dollars a night officiating. I'd do that several times a week. So, Jim and I became friends, and I said, "Jim, I don't know what to do about this baseball. We don't have a budget. The guys had to furnish their own gloves, and most cases, bats. We have no practice field. We have to practice on the ROTC drill field." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I would do. Why don't you come out to the Fort about two days a week, no more than that, before the soldiers get off duty, use their practice field and then stay on and scrimmage them after they get off duty?" So, we'd do that a couple days a week. We didn't play anybody, we'd just scrimmage them. That's what we did my first year.

The second, I wanted to get out, I was losing nearly all of my players on the basketball, I wanted to get out and recruit basketball players. Administration did not want me to have a baseball team because they didn't have it in the conference. But the players said, "Coach, you promised if we came to school here, we'd play baseball." They put the guilt trip on me. Finally I caved in and said, "Okay, but all we'll do is what we did last year. We can't play games because we don't have any uniforms. We'll just scrimmage the Fort Sill team."

So about two weeks to go in the baseball season, they came in one day and said, "Coach, we just heard they're going to have a national tournament the first time ever in junior college baseball. It's going to be at Northeastern, in Miami, Oklahoma," They said, "Why don't you try to get us in?" I said, "Guys, we don't have any uniforms, we don't have a record, we haven't played anybody." They just kept after me and so, I called out to Amarillo to regional director and I said, "Dr. Carter, I understand that you're going to have a national tournament in baseball. How can we qualify?" He said, "Well, what kind of season have you had?" I said, "Sir, we haven't lost to a college team this year." (laughter) So, I get a telegram two days later said Cameron will host the regional tournament. (laughter) And whoever wins the regional tournament will go to the national tournament in Miami, Oklahoma.

So, guys were pumped up, and I said, "Guys, we don't have uniforms, we don't have a baseball diamond," and one of the guys from Lawton said, "Coach, there's an old park out

here that was a D League park.” You know, back years ago, before free agency, you had to develop your own farm system, so every small town in America had a D League team. The park had been closed for years, boarded up. And they said, “Why don’t we go out to Memorial Park.” So, we go out, it’s awful. I mean the weeds are growing over. The fence has fallen in. The bleachers have fallen in. So, we got a lot of the students and everybody to help and in three days we painted and boarded it up and cleaned the fields and all of that and had it ready to play.

For uniforms, I didn’t know what to do, and I called my friend out at Fort Sill and I said, “Any of the teams out there have any extra uniforms?” He said, “The Fifth Field Artillery Battalion just got new uniforms.” I said, “What are you going to do with your old uniforms?”

“Ah, we’re just going to throw them away. They’re junky. We’ve had them for years.”

So I jumped in the car and drove out there and I took those uniforms and I stripped off “Field Artillery Battalion.” Now, if you looked carefully, you could still see it and I had a lady embroider “Aggies” on it. “The Fifth Field Artillery Battalion Aggies” was what it looked like.

We didn’t have enough caps for everybody. We didn’t have enough uniforms for me. I just coached in a Cameron tee shirt and sweatpants and sneakers. It was a pretty ragtag looking bunch but we had five basketball players, we had three football players, we had a golden gloves boxer, who had won the state golden gloves championship, and just some farm kids from Southwest Oklahoma, who had played a little baseball: that was our team.

Homer was the first black athlete to play in junior college in Oklahoma, both basketball and baseball. He was one of our pitchers. We had three Native Americans, but a bunch of guys who thought they were pretty good baseball players.

So, anyway, we swept four games to qualify for the national tournament. We qualified at going. I go to the athletic director and I said, “Leroy, we need some money to go to the tournament.” He said, “We don’t have enough money for staying in a hotel or anything.” And I called up there and they let us stay in the old army barracks. You know, back after the war, those colleges almost doubled enrollment with the veterans coming back in Oklahoma University and every place, and they moved in army barracks. In some cases, already had them right on the campus. And he said, “I’ve got enough gas money for you to take the two school station wagons.”

So, we just loaded up in those station wagons. It wasn’t like Hoosiers where this convoy of cars going to the state tournament, just two cars going to the national tournament in Miami, Oklahoma in Northeastern College. The Lawton paper didn’t think anything of our chances to even send a writer. We swept three games and win the national championship.

John Erling: And who were you playing?

TO: We played Phoenix, number one team in the country. They were like, sixty-something and three. We were four and O. They didn't think enough of us to even start their best pitcher. They started their number two pitcher. We beat them four to two. And then we played the Texas state champion, in Navarro Junior College, and I'd used up my two pitcher, so I said, "Any of you other guys ever pitched?" And our third baseman said, "I used to relief pitch a little bit at Shawnee High School. I wasn't very good." I said, "Well, give us three or four innings if you can."

So, he pitched and he got through the first inning fine. Then his control left him. We scored five runs in the first inning. We're ahead five, nothing, and he starts walking people. He walks the bases loaded and I don't have many choices but he's walking them on three-two pitches. I think, he's gonna get it in a minute. He walked the bases loaded and he walked three runners in. Now, it's five to three. I go out to the mound, and I said, "Dexter, I'm sorry. I've got to take you out." And he said, "Coach, you can't take me out. I've got a 'no-hitter' going." (laughter) It was a pretty loose group. (laughter) So anyway, win the semi-final game and we go to the final game and we're playing the host team, Northeastern.

They're licking their chops. There they are in their slick uniforms. They had good-looking uniforms and we had those raggedy uniforms. Our signals were very simple. If I tugged on my cap bill, B, that's a bunt. If I go to my skin, S is steal. That's all the signals that we had. So, I noticed during the course of the game, every time I'd go to my cap bill the other team would holler, "Watch for a bunt!" And I go here and, "Watch for a steal!"

So, in the seventh inning we jumped out five, nothing, and they were closing the gap. They'd come back five to four. But, before that inning, I called them together and I said, "Guys, it's obvious they've picked up our signals, we're just going to switch those." Now when I go to my cap bill that's a steal. I go to my skin and that's a bunt. So, we're going along, we get a runner on first and second, two out. And I wanted to start the runners moving on a three-two pitch. I want to start the runners moving. I forgot that I'd changed signals. I go to my skin for a steal, which is now a bunt, and the first baseman whose batting, Sid Griffin, he looked at me as if I'm crazy. I mean you don't bunt with two strikes on you. He backed out and I gave it to him again. He lays down a perfect bunt down the third base line. The third baseman's playing back as he would normally. Catcher goes out and fields it, tries to throw the runner out at first base. Overthrows the runner. We score two runs, win the national championship, and the Baylor coach who is trying to recruit one of our players, he comes over to me after the game, he said, "Coach, that's the most brilliant piece of strategy I've ever seen." (laughter) And he said, "You surprised everybody. You really surprised them." And I said, "Well, it surprised a lot of people." (laughter)

JE: And so you became national champions?

TO: We, now, yes. Ironically, instead of going home to a big celebration, we arrived back on campus; I dropped the guys off at the dorm, no parade, no nothing. But, what happened? Those guys that played on that team say that that year set a bar in their life in what they could accomplish and they went on to incredible successes. One became vice president of Walmart. One became the commander of the top gun school in the Navy. One became Dean of Education at Oklahoma City University. One became a national championship baseball coach, but all of them went on and got four-year degree and very successful lives.

Chapter 10 - 4:00

Coach University of Kansas

John Erling: Let me move you to Kansas, to Lawrence, Kansas. And you work as an assistant for head coach...?

Ted Owens: Dick Harp. Dr. Naismith was the first coach at Kansas, the inventor of the game. He actually went there as the head of the chapel. Dr. Naismith was an interesting man. He was a physician, he was a minister, he invented the game back in Springfield and then he brought the game to Kansas. He was the first coach, and then a man named W.O. Hamilton and then the great Dr. Forrest C. "Phog" Allen was the head coach thirty-eight years, and his assistant was Coach Harp, who was the fourth head coach.

I went to work for Coach Harp in 1960. Back then you only had one assistant. It was quite a nice jump. We talked earlier about, like, Coach Metcalf, the people who have such a great influence in your life, but, Monty Moore, who was a high school teammate of mine, was the telecaster for Kansas Basketball. Their assistant left, he heard that Jerry Wall was leave, well he went in and said, "Hey, I want to recommend Ted Owens." We knew each other the year I spent as assistant coach at Oklahoma. I'd gotten to know Coach Harp. They said, "If you get here in two days, we'll interview you before anybody else." I did that and I was able to get the job, but had I not had Monty Moore there, I wouldn't have had that opportunity.

JE: So, you were how old then about his time?

TO: I was thirty.

JE: Then you become head coach.

TO: At thirty-four. I was thirty-four when I became the head coach and was the head coach for nineteen years.

JE: Let's discuss the '65-'66 season.

TO: It was a great team. We had a very good, solid team and then I had a young man who had graduated from high school at mid-term, named Jo Jo White. He joined us at mid-term and we just blew everybody out after that. We had a winning margin of twenty-nine points a game the rest of the season.

We entered the regional tournament and beat the Southwest Conference team, SMU, and then we played Texas Western, who is now UTEP. Texas Western and Kansas, one of the greatest games ever, in NCAA tournament play, that game was played in Lubbock, Texas. At the end of the first overtime, Jo Jo White hit a shot to win the game and send us to the final four. An official came in late and said that Jo Jo stepped out of bounds. We'd already run on the court and we were celebrating, we're on our way to the final four.

Looking at the film, it appears Jo Jo pivoted and his heel came up over the plane, but never hit. Today, with all the camera angles it would be easy enough to tell whether he really stepped out, but anyway, we lost to them in the second overtime and they went on. They started five black players for the first time ever in an NCAA final game and beat an all white Kentucky team. So it was '66, an historic event.

JE: Because the national champion had five black players, yeah?

TO: Yes, yeah.

JE: Jo Jo White went onto the NBA, had a pretty good career.

TO: Was just in...was just inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame. The 1966 team, you know, you always say, "if, if you could've, should've," but had we gone on to have won the national championship, which I think we would have, we would've won that game, I think that might have gone down in Kansas history as the greatest team ever. It was an incredible team. Another All-American, Walt Wesley, was on that team, and just a really good cast. But, you can't claim to be the best team in Kansas history when two or three others have won national championships, so, but it certainly is one of the greatest teams ever in Kansas history.

Chapter 11 - 4:10

Campus Unrest

John Erling: On campus it was unrest. Vietnam War was causing unrest on campus.

Ted Owens: In the late sixties and early seventies, the social revolution hit nearly all the campuses in the country. We were one of the schools that were hit badly by it and in

fact, we were on a route on interstate 70. Lawrence was on a route from the east coast to the west coast. CBC on 60 Minutes did a story on this. A segment of their story was the "Kaw Valley." The Kaw Valley is the Native American name for Kansas Valley, and the Kaw Valley was very rich in marijuana. So, they called them the "Kaw Valley Hemp Pickers." So, for the radicals that moved from east coast to west coast, Lawrence was the stopover with the attraction of marijuana. And remember the Chicago Seven, the disruption at the Chicago Convention?

JE: In 1968.

TO: Yeah. One of the leaders of the Chicago Seven spoke at a rally on the campus and somehow out of all of that, they burned the student union, or at least a portion of the student union. And they also bombed the military science building and the computer center. They had to call the National Guard in and two bystanders were killed, were shot. It was a terrible time on our campus.

It was so bad that in the spring of 1970, the chancellor called all the students to the stadium and suspended school. We had about a month to go of school. But, they were worried about the safety of the people on the campus. It was a terrible time.

At the beginning of 1970, our team started off, we won five games, then we lost one, and our team was made up of both black and white players, but they had great love and respect for one another. That team set an example for the rest of the campus about how that people of different races can work together.

We won our first five games, we lost one, and then we ran-off twenty-one straight games and made it all the way to the final four, which was at Houston's Astrodome. So the rallying cry of the campus was: "Houston in March." Going to be in the final four in Houston in March. That team brought that campus together. In fact, the chancellor told me, he said, "Your team saved this campus." Well, there are a lot of other factors. I think we were a factor. But it was a great year. Made the final four but the most important thing is that we brought our campus back together.

JE: Had to be difficult to recruit.

TO: Oh, I had a '69 recruit in from New Mexico the previous year and they had a curfew on campus. All the big networks were on campus. Dan Rather was there on campus and people like that. It was a very, very difficult time. In fact, my players and people we were recruiting, they'd call me and they said, "Coach, what's going on on the campus?" Cause it was national news.

JE: Actually we had two points going here: unrest with the Vietnam War and then the Civil Right activity. Then you had black and female students; they were agitating for better representation.

TO: Yeah, yeah.

JE: So, it was a confluence of both of them.

TO: Yeah, it wasn't just one topic. I mean, there were a lot of things going on.

JE: Did you get called upon to make public statements to the campus because you were a leading figure there, you probably...?

TO: Well, as a matter of fact, I was on the city human rights commission. It was a difficult time. The city manager would have to go out at night and be in the headgear and their chest protectors and all of that. I was trying to use the guidance of some of my black friends on what we should do with the team and that sort of thing, so yeah, I was pretty much in the middle of it.

JE: You had gone to the final four. You didn't get to the finals with that team?

TO: No, UCLA beat us in the semi-finals.

Chapter 12 - 2:45

Phog Allen

John Erling: Talk to us about Dr. Phog Allen, he died in September of 1974.

Ted Owens: Dr. Allen had a great record at Kansas in basketball but he meant more to the game than just as a coach. Years ago, national champions were not determined with tournament play, but the Helms Foundation in Los Angeles picked a national champion and in 19, I believe, 22 and '23. Kansas was declared national champions under Dr. Allen. Later Doc won the national championship in 1952.

He was the head coach for thirty-eight years. He was bigger than life. He started the National Association of Basketball Coaches because he thought coaches should be the guardians of the game. He was instrumental in getting basketball into the Olympics. He was a great, great man. Had a lot of sayings that I still use today even though I didn't have the privilege of working with him. He was still there when I was there. In fact, we named our most valuable player award "Forrest C. 'Phog' Allen Award."

JE: His nickname, "Phog," came from what?

TO: The loudness of his...

JE: His voice?

TO: Voice, yes.

JE: He was baseball umpire, I think, too, wasn't he?

TO: He coached football. He was coaching three teams at one time. He was coaching Haskell Institute; he was coaching Baker University, and coaching University of Kansas.

JE: Is it true his 590 wins are the most of any coach of the Kansas basketball program, 590?

TO: Yes. Yeah, he had the most wins.

JE: He lettered in baseball, basketball, played under James Naismith, the inventor of the game.

TO: Yeah.

JE: I mean he was a giant of giants, wasn't he?

TO: He was a giant of giants. You need to go to KU. Outside of Allen Fieldhouse is his statue. Inside there a big banner that warns people: "Beware of the Phog," to the visiting teams. So you still feel his presence. Even when I was head coach, he would come in just before the game would start up in the first row of the balcony. It was almost as if, okay, you can start the game, Doc Allen's here, that kind of presence that everybody knew when he came in.

JE: Was he intimidating to you?

TO: I had played for Oklahoma against Kansas, in fact, we beat them in Hoch Auditorium in 1951. So, we were sort of proud of Oklahoma basketball. So, I wasn't in awe of Kansas basketball until I went there until I realized the history of the place. Dr. Naismith. Dr. Allen was famous as a locker room orator. I mean his teams were motivated and they came to play.

Chapter 13 - 6:00

Fired

John Erling: Then, help me here with the year you were fired.

Ted Owens: '83.

JE: Eighty, eighty-three, all right. Your overall career then with Kansas would have been - how many conference championships?

TO: In the nineteen years as head coach, we won either fifteen either regular season or tournament championships, and made it to the final four twice.

JE: But then the team under performed the last few years as head coach.

TO: Yes. The worst thing you can do in recruiting is to finish second. It is like a poker game. You're better off in poker if you either win it or get out early. But, when you finish second you commit all your time and resources and so forth, and we went after some high profile basketball players and didn't get them. We suffered greatly for that. But, then in 1982 we had the best recruiting year that we had in years, so my last year there we had a great freshman group, and toward the end of the season we were really good, and I was red-shirting seven-foot Greg Dreiling out of Wichita. So we had the nucleus of a really good team, but they made a decision. They wanted a change, so they did.

- JE:** That was the new Athletic Director that came in?
- TO:** Yeah, yeah.
- JE:** Monte Johnson?
- TO:** Mhm.
- JE:** That had to be tough for you.
- TO:** Yeah. I was - twenty-three years of my life I'd been there.
- JE:** Did it come out of the cold blue or did you think, maybe something would happen?
- TO:** No, I think when he came in he felt he had a mandate change. He fired Don Fambrough, longtime football coach, and I just think that he wanted change. It was the perfect time to make a change because everybody knew we had a great young team. We were going to be good in the next few years, so it was heartbreaking to me not to be able to restore us to what we had been before.
- JE:** Who replaced you?
- TO:** Larry Brown came in. Roy Williams followed him and then, today, Bill Self.
- JE:** Right, could you go back to games after you were fired?
- TO:** I went once and my heart wasn't, erm, I just couldn't handle it, so I didn't go back for ten years. And then I went back to a reunion. When Roy Williams was coach, he started having reunions every five years. When they introduced me on the court, the crowd gave me a, I don't know how many minutes, standing ovation. And it touched my heart.
- JE:** It touches your heart today, doesn't it?
- TO:** Yeah, it does. In fact, two of my kids were sitting there and one of them said, "This is the greatest day of my life." (laughter)
- JE:** That was nice that they had that appreciation for you.
- TO:** Yeah, and they still do.
- JE:** That was ten years later?
- TO:** Yeah, then years later.
- JE:** So when you go back up there now, they still...?
- TO:** When I go back now it's incredible. They give me wonderful ovations. In twenty-three years you fall in love with the place. In fact, I'm fortunate; I have two universities I love. The University of Oklahoma gave me opportunities that I never imagined and the University of Kansas was incredible. The only problem I have is when the two of them play each other.
- JE:** How did it come so that it was resolved in your mind so that you weren't as emotional about it? Just time, did it, or was there a way that you manipulated that feeling?
- TO:** I think time more than anything. I know my wife and I talked about it. She knew how close we were to restoring it back because she'd been involved in it.
- JE:** And her name?

TO: Michelle. She knew how close we were to getting it back into being a championship program again and how hard we'd worked to do that, and then to be stripped of an opportunity to do that was really difficult to handle. But, I reminded her: you go through hurt, disappointment, if you're not careful, bitterness. So I told her one day, I said, "You know, we have a lot of friends here at the University of Kansas that we've made over the years, and they really like us, but they love the University of Kansas. So let's don't make them make a choice." We decided to accept it, go on, don't lose those friendships.

JE: Because you were still loved by the fans and faculty and all that.

TO: Yeah.

JE: The team then, after you were fired and they went on the next year or two, how did they perform?

TO: Very well. The next year they won the Big Eight Conference tournament. And then the next year they made it to the Final Four.

JE: And that was under Larry Brown?

TO: Yeah, and when they made the final four, three of those starters in the final four team were my players.

JE: Could you embrace or did that hurt? (laughter)

TO: It hurt. (laughter) It hurt but I was happy for the guys.

JE: Right, yeah. Well anybody listening to this can sympathize with you but knowing that you came out of it and you became successful...

TO: Well, you know, I attribute a lot of that to my dad, you know? When my dad's crops blew out, he didn't whimper, didn't whine, he just: "Let's go replant, boys." But he set an example for resilience that's been good for me. That when things happen, and quite frankly, John, my faith, is what gets me through.

JE: Yeah.

TO: I do believe there's a purpose in this life, and we don't understand it sometimes, it gets pretty complicated, but...

JE: Are you able to look back and say, "If that firing hadn't happened, then this way wouldn't have happened?" because there's always something coming out of a firing that's good.

TO: That's right, I look and say, "You know, there are people that I have met that really mean so much to me that I never would have known."

JE: You took a job at a securities brokerage firm in Kansas City. You did commentating for the Shockers Telecasts.

TO: Right.

Chapter 14 – 6:21
ORU

John Erling: Then you were offered a job at ORU?

Ted Owens: Yeah.

JE: And you took that. Did Oral Roberts recruit you?

TO: Actually, at that time, two people ran the athletic program. It was a little unusual, but Bob Patterson, who was a local businessman here, and a former great player at TU, and Dr. Winslow, an orthopedic surgeon, sort of ran the athletic program. They stayed in touch with me. I was doing pretty well in the securities business and finally I just gave them about ten things that I knew they couldn't do if I'd come. And they called me one night and said, "We're good." So I came here and I had some concerns because Ken Hayes, who's a good man and a good friend, had been fired at Christmas time one year, so I was concerned and people had said, "Well, you know, the family gets involved."

JE: That would be both Oral and his son, Richard?

TO: Yeah. So, I came here and developed a really good friendship with Oral.

JE: Tell us a little bit about him when you were close with him. How would you describe him?

TO: He would say, "Hey, Ted, can you meet me at about two o'clock? Let's go play golf." Although he belonged to Southern Hills, he also belonged to the Golf Club of Oklahoma, and he liked to get out of way of things, and so we'd go out and he'd tell me a lot about his ministry. As a matter of fact, when they brought me here to interview with the president, it was interesting. They have enclosed places in the buildings where they drive their cars, and so forth, and so the day they brought me in they flew me in on his private plane. They took us and they drove us inside a building, enclosed area, and out on the campus. We met with him and I was impressed.

His eyes can look right through you, penetrating eyes, and his strong handshake. I told him, I said, "President, I don't know much about your ministry. I'm not charismatic. I have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but I don't know much about the healing ministry or the charismatic movement." He said, "Ted, you do the coaching, I'll do the preaching." (laughter) And he said, "If you want to know more about our ministry, we will talk to you anytime about it." He was very fair and he always held up to that. Quite frankly, I had a great fondness for him. He and I made some golf trips together. He'd drop by every once in a while and contrary to what people had said, he did not interfere, he himself did not.

When I came here it was a bad time to come here. It had been about a fifty-fifty season before and they'd lost all their starters so I told them, I said, "It's going to be three years before we can give you the kind of team that you want." People are going to have to bear with it. So, the first year, we play the good teams, the really good teams, and

we'd lose ten to fifteen points. Second year, our record wasn't much better, it was a little better, but we're playing the good teams two and three point games, and finally Tulsa, who had beaten us thirteen straight times, we beat that year in the Mayor's Cup. So we were getting it turned around and I had a player named Haywoode Workman who went on to become an eleven-year NBA player, that was kind of the nucleus of the team and I had red-shirted about four proposition forty-eight.

Let me explain that: Years ago, the NCAA did not have anything to do with who's eligible. They left that up to the conferences. If you were an independent they just left it up to each school, so you could determine who got in school or not if you're an independent. That's why people wanted to be an independent; Syracuse, Marquette, Notre Dame, all those schools like being independent. It was easier to get into the NCAA Tournament. You see, back then you had to win your conference to get into the tournament. And now, as you know, they'll be eight or nine teams out of a conference get in.

Anyway, I had red-shirted four guys who could play and had Haywoode, and then unfortunately they tried to get me to hire an assistant and I refused and basically Richard said, "If you don't do what family does, you don't stay here." You know, and I just said, "I'm not going to do something for the program when I know it's not in the best interest of the program."

JE: So they wanted you to hire an assistant?

TO: Yeah. They wanted to fire one of my assistants and force me to hire.

JE: Okay.

TO: Yeah.

JE: Who was the assistant they wanted you to hire?

TO: It was Coach Trickey. Ken and I were great friends. We were as far apart in basketball philosophy as you could be. I wanted the program run the way that I wanted and I just finally said look, "If you don't want me here, just settle my contract." It was sad because we were on the verge of being really good.

JE: Yeah, and I think Richard wanted you to score a hundred points?

TO: Yeah, I told him at the time, I said, "Richard, I'd rather win a game seventy-two to sixty-four than to score a hundred points and lose a game." And I said, "Quite frankly, we don't have that kind of scorers, right now, that we can go up and down, and, you know, get into a shooting match with people. We have to do it defense and selective shooting and so forth." Anyway it was sad because I think we could have had a good run. It would have been good. But, having said that, I loved the people at Oral Roberts: the faculty and the supporters, all are great people, and I have a great relationship today with them. Mike Carter's a great friend and Scott Sutton's a wonderful person.

JE: So, this was in the seventies.

TO: Yeah.

JE: I came in seventy-six and then I remember then Anthony Roberts was the star of that team. Coach Trickey brought him on, didn't he?

TO: Yeah, It's pretty remarkable what they did. When they went into division one in early seventies, Ken called one day and said, "Can we bring our staff and come up and visit with you so we can do some things that we need to be a successful division one program?" They came up and spent a couple days with us.

JE: They came from where?

TO: Here, Oral Roberts. I was at Kansas.

JE: Oh, I see, in Kansas, you were.

TO: I was at Kansas.

JE: Okay.

Chapter 15 - 6:00

The Game

Ted Owens: Just in a short period of time, you know, they had a very competitive team. In fact, in 1974, we played them in one of the great games.

John Erling: That is the game that's talked about to this very day.

TO: They call it "The Game."

JE: The Game. It was 1974. This was the first time that Ken was at ORU because he did come back.

TO: Yes.

JE: He, of course, coached ORU and you were at Kansas, and that was an historic game. What do you recall from that game?

TO: It was one of the truly great games in NCAA playoff history. The team that won that game would go to the final four. That's in 1974. We didn't have great players but we had about seven good players with almost equal ability. They had, well Anthony Roberts was a freshman. They were so good that he didn't even start. That tells you how good they were.

JE: Yeah.

TO: They had just stunned everybody. It is easier to get into the NCAA Tournament as an independent, but if you were a member of the major conference and win your tournament, you were automatically in the Sweet Sixteen. Oral Roberts had to play a play-in game, I believe Syracuse. Then they won that, and now they play Louisville. We beat Creighton, coached by Eddie Sutton, close game, like one point game. And Oral

Roberts upset Louisville in an overtime game. So, here it was, Oral Roberts and Kansas to determine who went to the final four.

We jumped out to a great lead. We jumped out to a fifteen-point lead. Everything was clicking, but we knew they were too good to not come back, especially on their home court, and they not only come back but they go ahead by nine with three minutes to go. Interesting enough, right in front of our bench it said: "Expect a miracle," (laughter) and we were down nine with three minutes to go.

We came back, hit our last five shots, stopped them two or three times and sent the game into overtime. Then we won the game in overtime, like ninety-three to ninety. I mean it was a great, great game. It was so unexpected because that was one of those years nobody expected us to go to the final four, and we did. You know, there're years like sixty-six when you expected to get there that you didn't.

JE: Certainly nobody expected ORU to get there.

TO: No, you know, it's like you hear people that say: "I was there the night Wilt Chamberlain hit the hundred points." And Wilt said over the years, "The place only seated twelve thousand but there must have been fifty thousand people who said they were there that night."

JE: And of course Wilt was at Kansas.

TO: Well, like I say, it was pretty amazing, Ken and his staff got there in a hurry, like I say, it was only three or four years if I remember right that they came to Lawrence to talk. So, getting back to that, the sad thing about the ORU thing is that we were on the verge of being pretty good. The other sad thing of it is I did what I thought was best for the program and didn't think there should be any changes made and they had great fondness for Ken, which they should have from years before, but my own judgment, Ken and I were just so far apart in basketball philosophy that I didn't think it would be a workable relationship and had nothing to do with our personal feelings. In fact, we've talked about it many times. In fact, when he had cancer, we talked about that and both of us were sorry about the way that it happened.

JE: Ken has sense died. I interviewed him and Richard Fuqua right here at this very table about Oral. He liked basketball because he enjoyed that as a young lad, didn't he?

TO: He did.

JE: So, that was his sport.

TO: He said, "He believed in his ministry that you reached people where they are, and people loved sports." He felt that he could use sports to further his ministry.

JE: I've interviewed Oral Roberts as well and you can hear him on VoicesofOklahoma.com. A comment, we talk about wins and loses and conference championships and final fours, but a coach like yourself has tremendous influence on players, not just to win that game or that tournament, but in life.

TO: Yeah, I heard a minister this year said something, I was at the final four, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, of which I'm very fond and have great respect for, and Athletes in Action and so forth, they're Christian organizations, and they combined to have a service for the coaches at the final four. I went this year and Donell Jones, who's the Chaplin of the University of Maryland, he was speaking and he said, "You don't use young people to win games, you use the game to win young people." That's what we should be doing.

Someone said once that athletics builds character and I said, "Not automatically. If it's not conducted in the proper way, it doesn't build character, it builds characters, and people who think they are entitled and so forth." So, there's a fine line and as teachers and coaches, coaches especially, we're doing something that we have a captive audience. We're talking to them about something that's important to them and so we have a chance to influence lives almost more than anybody does.

We need leaders in this world. We need leaders who know about teamwork. We need leaders who have good moral values and spiritual values. We really have a wonderful opportunity to have an effect on people.

Chapter 16 - 5:35

Advice to Future Student Athletes

John Erling: You family now, we didn't talk about sons and maybe grandchildren, describe maybe members of your family.

Ted Owens: Okay, well, my wife, Michelle, is an elementary school teacher. She has one more year of teaching. She teaches in Tulsa Public School System at Carnegie. I think a really great teacher, and great wife, and a great mother, great grandma. She loves more than anything being a grandmother.

My oldest daughter, Nancy, just finished her doctorate at University of Florida. She's a reading specialist. She has one son, Arthur, who's in school at Boston University, wants to be a sportscaster.

Daughter, Kelly is a French Chef. She graduated from the great French Chef school in Chicago, and she's in Santa Fe.

Son Teddy is Director of Operations of the University of Nebraska Basketball and he and Ashley have two sons. Get this, John, they were both born in March during March Madness. He named his first son Layton Bracket Owens. He named his newest son Nash Naismith Owens. Those kids are going to grow up and have no interest in sports at all and wonder: how did we get these names?

Then daughter Taylor has her doctorate from TCU as a Nurse anesthetist. She is at Saint Francis, here. They're all doing great. I have a great wife, four wonderful children, and three grandsons.

JE: That's great. Your advice to students, to student athletes maybe, or whatever, what do you say to kids who are coming out of college now and going into the real world?

TO: First of all, use lessons that you've learned. We're so fortunate to have been working with teams and to understand that each role is important. I used to tell our players when they would run sprints. If you don't make your time, everybody runs over. One of the players said one day, "Well, Coach, I made my time, why should I run over?" And I said, "You have to realize that if everyone doesn't do their job, then we all fail."

So, athletes have a step ahead of the average person. They've had the team experience. They understand how important each role is, they've had the discipline you have to have to be successful and the commitment that you have to have. So, I just encourage them to use the lessons that they've learned.

One of the things that I try to remind them is that God loves that other person every bit as much as he does you, that you have respect for everyone. If they'll do that I think they'll be successful.

JE: Bill Self, who is the current coach at Kansas, is a friend of yours.

TO: Yeah.

JE: He's embraced you. You've embraced him. We've been talking about Allen Fieldhouse, he has a record of two hundred and two wins and nine loses in Allen Fieldhouse.

TO: Yeah, well right now, he and I are tied for the most wins at Allen Fieldhouse. It's two hundred and six now. He won every game last year, and I tell people, they say, "Well, he did it in a lot less years than you did." I say, "There are two reasons: the first reason is that they play a lot more games than we did, but the most important reason is he wins all of his games." (laughter) But, Bill Self is the complete package.

He, first of all, is a good man and he understands what I understand that you're only as good those players that you have and that they're what's important. But he's a great recruiter, a great teacher, great discipline, erm, wonderful communicator; everybody on the campus loves him. I remember when Roy Williams left, everybody was so down about it but nobody remembers that now. It's hard to be good every year. He's either won or tied the championship twelve straight years.

JE: He had a great success here at Tulsa University and then went to Illinois and then and then went to Kansas, but he had this whole town abuzz when he was the coach here and it was very sad when he left.

TO: Yeah, he reminds people of something that's important: his first job here at ORU, he lost eighteen straight games, so he understands what the other side of it is, but in just two or three years here at ORU he had turned that program around.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

TO: I'm so blessed to be eighty-six, almost eighty-seven, pretty good health and able to do a lot of things that I want to do, but with that blessing comes the sadness of losing friends.

I had a friend of mine, named Stan Grossman, who played with me in 1951 at Oklahoma, his family asked me to speak at his memorial service. And I did, but I remembered what Stan said one time to me, I said, "Stan, what do you want your son, Mark, to be?" He said, "Ted, I just want him to be a good man." And I guess that's what I want to be. I want to be remembered as a good man, but I also want to feel personally that I am and sometimes I have a piece to go to get there.

JE: Well, I want to thank you for this time, your detail and all. You did a great job of telling your story and others' as well, so thank you for providing this time with Voices of Oklahoma.

TO: Well, John, thank you. I've always been a great admirer of your work and I miss hearing your morning show; I used to listen to it all the time.

JE: Thank you very much.

TO: It's been great, thank you for having me.

JE: Absolutely.

Chapter 17 - O:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research, and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time on VoicesofOklahoma.com.