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Jim Brown, Former Coach, Men's Basketball, Wright State University

Dan Abrahamowicz
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Jim Brown
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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Retiree Association Oral History Project

Interview date: 1/26/2018

Interviewer: Dan Abrahamowicz (DA)
Vice President for Student Affairs, Retired

Interviewee: Jim Brown (JB)
Former Coach, Men's Basketball

Dan Abrahamowicz: Today is Friday, January 26, 2018. My name is Dan Abrahamowicz, former Vice President for Student Affairs, and current member of the Wright State University Retiree's Association. We're here as part of the Retiree's Association's Oral History Project and we're very pleased this morning to be interviewing Jim Brown. Jim is the first coach we have interviewed for this series, coaching men's basketball for over 26 years and now as a color commentator for Wright State Radio, for men's basketball on Wright State Radio. How are you doing, Jim?

Jim Brown: I'm good! It's good to be here.

DA: Listen, tell us a little bit about yourself. We know a little bit about your history at Wright State University and so on, but what about before that? Where are you from, where were you born, where'd you go to school, and so forth?

JB: Well, I lived in Dayton most of my life, my parents moved to Dayton when I was six years old.

DA: Where were they before?

JB: They were in Lancaster, Ohio. My dad was actually a basketball coach for a short period of time and I really never talked to him about why he got out of it. He actually took a team to a state championship here in Ohio, he was at a small school down in southeastern Ohio called Corning High School, and he had the player of the year in the state that year. But he got out of coaching and we moved to Dayton and he got into the banking business, and then later he worked for a company called Agrey Register [*sp?*], which had their building right across from the Dragon's Stadium now.

DA: Now what year did you move to Dayton?

JB: We actually we moved in 1950, during that blizzard.

DA: Oh, really? There's a 1950? They've recently talked about the '78 blizzard.

JB: Yeah, I know, but the blizzard in '50 was a bad one, too. It was actually when Ohio State played Michigan that weekend.

DA: Oh, the famous Ohio State and Michigan snow game!

JB: Yes! Yes, and of course I don't remember that. I just remember when we got to Dayton I had to sleep in a bathtub that night because our furniture didn't make it.

DA: And how old were you then?

JB: Six, I think.

DA: Oh, six you said that, I'm sorry.

JB: I went to Belmont High School and played basketball there. Then I went to the University of Dayton, I played freshman basketball for the Flyers, graduated from there in 1966. And then I went to Xavier University and got a Master's Degree in Guidance Counseling.

DA: You went right from UD to Xavier?

JB: I did, I took ROTC. A lot of people won't, but they kind of say "really?" But when I at Dayton you had to take ROTC, it was required, and I had to take it my freshman and sophomore year. Then after your freshman and sophomore year, if you got invited to go on you could accept that and go for two more years and then when you graduated you were commissioned as an officer in the army. That's what I did, and I was commissioned as an officer in the army, and they gave me a one year deferment to pursue a Master's Degree.

DA: What was your Bachelor's Degree in?

JB: It was in Biology Education. I wanted to be a biology teacher and I thought, well, I'll do that for a while, and then I want to be able to be a guidance counselor, because that might be a little easier. But anyway, so I did that and I only had one year to do that, so after that year I went into the army.

DA: Did you get your degree then?

JB: No, I had everything done except for my research paper. I had to kind of rush my research paper and he didn't accept it, the professor didn't accept it. Which turned out to be kind of a blessing later on as things turned out. So anyway, in May of '68 I had to start my army commitment.

DA: And was that for 4 years?

JB: Two. Just two years. I was stationed in Fort Lee, Virginia. I went to Red Stone Arsenal in Alabama and then from there I was sent to Vietnam.

DA: What year did you go to Vietnam?

JB: I went there in September of '69. It was the time when they had the largest number of troops in Vietnam.

DA: Central Highlands?

JB: No, I actually I was right on the Cambodia border, we were 3 miles from the Cambodian border, it was called Tainan, but everybody called it 'Rocket City' because we just got hit with rockets all the time. They would shoot them from Cambodia into our base camp. Nobody in my company ever got killed, but you never were easy. I mean there were days where I set in my bed one night and heard, I counted them, 238 mortars land.

DA: Oh my gosh.

JB: You just think "Is the next one going to land here?" So, what happened about my research paper was Nixon decided he was going to start withdrawing troops, and so if you could show that you were going back to college, they would give you some days off. So I had everything done but my research paper, so I wrote Xavier and they said yes. So I got out a couple months early.

DA: So how long were you in Vietnam?

JB: I was actually in Vietnam for 7 months. It was very unusual, Dan, to be sent to Vietnam, particularly as an officer, for less than a year. I thought I was home free, I really did. I was married and...

DA: You got married before you went to Vietnam?

JB: I got married before I went to Vietnam.

DA: Did you get married while you were at UD?

JB: No, we were married in August of 1967. What happened was when I graduated from Dayton, I decided I was going to get my Master's Degree but I said I would do some substitute teaching, but just a couple of days a week. The Dayton Public Schools called me and said "Jim, I know you only want to sub a couple days a week but we have this opportunity where we just need you for 2 weeks, and after 2 weeks there's a situation where the regular person would be back in 2 weeks." So I accepted it, it was at Eastmont Elementary, and I go over there and the principal at the time knew me because I had played basketball against them as an eighth grader. He is introducing me to the faculty members and he introduced me to this math teacher and it was my future wife. We started

dating each other and got married shortly after that in '67. But anyway, when I got out of Vietnam in February of '70, prior to getting out- it might have been December of '69- I got a letter in the mail from John Ross, my high school coach.

DA: High School coach of Belmont?

JB: My high school coach at Belmont, who I had done some scouting work with. Back in those days you could scout teams live and it was permissible at the NCAA level to scout teams live. In other words, you could go watch a team play and scout them. What John did was he started his own little business where he would look at local schools like Miami, Xavier, Cincinnati, Dayton and he'd look at their schedule and he would find teams on there that were a long ways away, and instead of them sending somebody and spending a lot of money to scout, he would do a report and sell it to them.

DA: I'll be darned.

JB: So, I helped him do that.

DA: Did he go on his own, and then recouped his expenses by selling the report?

JB: Yes, in fact one time, and I tell this story because Wright State this past weekend just played up at Milwaukee, and we played in what's called the Panther Arena now, but it started out as the Mecca, it was built in 1950 in Milwaukee. It's a gorgeous arena now, I was just in it the other night because that's where Wright State played, but the interesting thing is in 1968, I think it was in like January of '68, John Ross, his wife, my wife and I flew to Milwaukee and we scouted a tournament. There was a tournament up there, and there were four teams in the tournament: LSU with Pete Maravich, Florida State with Dave Cowens- he was a great player in the NBA- Milwaukee, no, I'm sorry, it was Marquette, and Wisconsin. Those were the four teams and we scouted all four teams, John sold the reports, and it paid for all of our airline expenses, paid for the hotel expenses, and they gave me a couple hundred dollars. He did that and I think that may be why when he was named the coach at Wright State, the first coach at Wright State, he asked me to be his assistant, because I kind of worked with him and I think he kind of appreciated it.

DA: And so he was hired when at Wright State?

JB: He was hired, I want to say- when he was hired, they decided to start the program as a freshman and sophomore program. It wasn't an NCAA certified program, they played JV teams around the local area like Ohio State and schools like that. So he only had freshman and sophomores, they were all walk-ons, there were no scholarships, it was just him. I wasn't involved with that team because I was still in Vietnam. When I got back in February of '70, they had made the commitment to make it a full-fledged varsity program where you were going to compete against four-year schools, so I was involved in that and I can remember I got home in February, and it was shortly after that I was out looking at players. We signed four players that first year, we signed Jimmy Mitch from Carroll High

School, who I was involved in because that was right close to where I lived. David McGill from Belmont High School, Bill Fogt from Pickaway, and Greg McCurdy from Centerville. Those were our first four players.

DA: So did you start at Wright State in February of '70?

JB: I did, but I wasn't official.

DA: You weren't official?

JB: I wasn't official. He wanted me to be the assistant coach but of course he had to go through a lot of hoops. That was one thing about Wright State, I tell people today that if, for example, we wanted to offer a scholarship to a player we had to get Athletic Council approval. We just couldn't go and say "Hey son, we're offering a scholarship." We had to get our academic things in line, get information, and give it to the Athletic Council.

DA: So these four guys you just mentioned, you had to go through Athletic Council? Was that done during that early period when you started?

JB: Oh I'd say for the first- you know, this has been a long time ago- but I would say for the first 4 or 5 years. They were very cautious about the program, starting an athletic program from scratch, they didn't want to have any issues.

DA: Do you remember who was in charge of Athletic Council back then?

JB: Well, there was Carl Benner, who was on the Athletic Council, Gordy Wise was on the Athletic Council. Carl Benner was I professor here-

DA: Gordy Wise still does the PA announcements still at the basketball games.

JB: Yes, he does. There was a physics professor, and I'm going to miss his name. But there was about, I want to say 9 or 10 people on the Athletic Council, and they met periodically, and it wasn't a deal where we had to wait for them to meet. If we had a recruit, we could get the academic information and give it to our athletics director, and he would make some phone calls and they would say "yes" or "no".

DA: So 1970 was a seminal moment where John Ross hired you and then you became assistant coach. Did you become sort of a full-time assistant coach the following year?

JB: No. John wasn't full time.

DA: Oh, he wasn't even full time?

JB: No, he wasn't even full time. He actually, what John did during the day, was he supervised student teachers.

DA: For Wright State?

JB: For Wright State, he would travel around this part of Ohio and observe them and critique them and help them become better teachers, and I worked for the admissions office- well actually, Dan, the first couple years I was still teaching. I got home in '70, I taught a year at Fairview High School, then a year at Longfellow. Both of those years I was part time at Wright State, I was making a thousand dollars or something, and I think after that second year, which would have been '72 or '73, they had made the commitment to build the PE building, and they decided they were going to make the head coach and assistant coach full time positions.

DA: During those early years, where did you guys play?

JB: Well, we played at Stebbins High School. We practiced at Stebbins High School, we played at Stebbins High School.

DA: And were you D-II at that point?

JB: We were just what was called "small college". We played schools like Cumberland in Kentucky, Berea, Otterbein, Wilmington- that's where John graduated from- and Wilmington killed us a couple of times, and it just killed John. Because when you were starting out, the first 2 years we struggled. I think the first year we won 8 games, and the second year we won 9. But then we got it going, I mean, we went 17 and 5, 17 and 8-

DA: So, once you were really committed- and when was the PE building built?

JB: '73, it opened in '73.

DA: So you were a Dayton guy, a UD guy, and Xavier. What was your impression of Wright State when you got a call from John?

JB: I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know anything. I guess when I was in college, you know, you read about they were asking people to contribute to a 2 year school that was going to be a branch of Miami and Ohio State. I can remember they were raising money to fund this school, they had one building, I never had been out there, in fact the first time I was on campus was when I came out to meet with the Athletic Council when John was wanting me to be an assistant. I knew nothing about Wright State. I mean, I was a huge UD fan. I mean huge!

DA: Well, UD was top notch at that time. Was that the Donnie May era and so forth?

JB: Yeah. Well, Donnie May and I played high school basketball together for John. John was the coach.

DA: Donnie May was at Belmont, too?

JB: Belmont. And Bill Hosket, who went on to play at Ohio State and won an Olympic gold medal.

DA: Did you think about college basketball at all?

JB: Well, I played at UD-

DA: Oh, you did play at UD?

JB: Yeah, I was a freshman there and at that time they had some freshmen who weren't eligible, so you had your freshman team and then your varsity team. You had to get invited to participate on the varsity, and the head coach at the time was Tom Blackburn, and he was very sick with cancer. I think it had a bearing on my career, I don't regret anything, but I was a good player on the freshman team, but I didn't get the opportunity to advance. So I stayed at UD, you know, I didn't pursue going to another university to play basketball because I was such a UD fan as a kid growing up. I just lived and died with their basketball program, and even so when I came to Wright State, for a couple years I maintained my season tickets there and went to all of their games, and then it just got too difficult. There was too many conflicts.

DA: So the first couple years was kind of building the program thing with John Ross, right? So, like '73 you hit your stride, kind of?

JB: Well, we had a winning season in '73.

DA: Was that the first winning season?

JB: Yeah.

DA: And that was the first year with the new PE building?

JB: Yeah, we opened the PE building, and there's pictures of this, but they had stands on one side, and the game was on live television, channel 2, and we played the game-

DA: Was that the first game in the PE building?

JB: The first game in the PE building, and they only had bleachers on one side. Then we had to move out after that game was over, we couldn't play there while they installed the bleachers on the other side. So we played the game at Xenia Benner Field House- it's a great trivia question to ask somebody, "Where are the 5 sites that Wright State played a home basketball game?"

DA: And can you name them all?

JB: Oh yeah! I was in every one of them. Stebbins was our main place. Then we played that one game at Xenia, then we played games at UD arena, President Keggereis told us

that because we had such big crowds at the PE building, which only seated about 2,600, that if we wanted to play at UD Arena, we could do that, and he supported that, then we played some games down there.

DA: That was nice of UD to support that, too.

JB: Yeah, and then we played in the PE building, and then we played at the Nutter Center. So, 5 places. A lot of people can tell you Stebbins, and they can tell you UD, but they can't remember Xenia because we only played just that one game, and it was because they had to install the bleachers on the other side.

DA: So, John Ross was pretty successful then as Wright State became a... was that still called a small college back in '73?

JB: Yeah, there really wasn't a definition of a Division I and Division II at that time. It was college and small college. I can't remember exactly when that transition occurred where they started to classify you as Division II.

DA: So, when did Ross leave?

JB: Well, John coached at Wright State for 5 years.

DA: So, 1975, roughly?

JB: Yes, and you could understand this, the university and the athletic program was expanding, and Don Mohr was our athletic director, and it was just Don. We had soccer, we had swimming, we had baseball, we had basketball, probably golf, I can't remember all of the sports.

DA: Did you have women's sports at that time?

JB: Yes. Yes, we did women's swimming, I don't know about women's soccer.

DA: Not basketball, though?

JB: You know, that's a good question. I know we didn't have it right away, but we got it shortly after that. So anyway, the athletic program was expanding and they decided to hire an assistant athletic director, and Don approached John about, you know, "We're going to hire an assistant athletic director", and said, "Is this something you would be interested in?" And John did, and he took the job, and I was really surprised. Because we were just turning the corner with our basketball program and we were really starting to have some success. He had this opportunity, and he took it, and that's when the university hired Marcus Jackson.

DA: In 1975? '75-'76 season?

JB: Yeah, '75- '76 season, and we had a really good season. We went to the NCAA tournament and it was with players that John and I had recruited, but we had a very successful season, went to the NCAA tournament, and two years later it was Marcus' third year, to this day I can't tell you what happened, but we were like 13 and 4 and we were playing Virginia Commonwealth, who was a Division I school. We were still Division II, and we were playing Virginia Commonwealth in the PE building, place was sold out, because they were 16 and 4 and we might have been 14 and 4. We had a really good record. We lost the game by 4 points, and for whatever reason our season just took a nosedive. We lost 10 games in a row.

DA: Oh, my gosh.

JB: There were some issues between Marcus and Don and whatever. So anyway, at the end of the season they decided to replace Marcus, and it was a contentious time here at the university, in terms of Marcus felt like he was treated unfairly.

DA: So this was like '78 then?

JB: Yeah, that would have been '78. It was kind of a tough time for me because I didn't know where we were going to go with this, and I was told that 'we're replacing the head coach, but we want you to stay and apply for the job', and this and this and this. So, I knew Coach Underhill, I had talked with him on the phone a couple of times. He was an assistant coach at Chattanooga.

DA: Tennessee, Chattanooga?

JB: Tennessee, Chattanooga, and they had just won the Division II National Championship.

DA: Wait, before you get to that. Marcus was terminated after that season?

JB: Yes, yes he was. Which was a shock to me. I mean I was very surprised that it happened, and Marcus was fine at first, but then he felt like I had something to do with it and he filed a suit against the university. It was finally settled, but it really kind of disrupted things for a while, and when Coach Underhill was hired I was disappointed, because I was promised things that didn't happen. So, I was very disappointed and I was kind of stuck, because it was May and I couldn't go anywhere, and when Coach Underhill came in and he had his press conference he said "Jim, we're going to go to lunch." So, we went to lunch and he told me "Look, you're not going to be an assistant, we're going to be co-coaches, we're going to do this together".

DA: He knew you?

JB: No! No, we had talked on the phone and I never had met him. We talked on the phone a couple of times relative to scouting stuff, you know, and teams we had played that they were about to play. But I had never met him and he came up and had his press

conference and everything and we went to lunch after that, and he told me “I know what’s happened here, I know you’re probably very upset, but I just want you to know we’re going to work together on this. I’m going to go back and get you a raise.” Which he did, and he was such a great guy to work with. You never felt like you were working for him, it was like you were working with him.

DA: Talk about it just for a minute. One of the videos I saw on the basketball site, you were sort of reflecting on his public persona versus how he was in real life sort of.

JB: I think that’s why Ralph and I got along so well, is because we were very similar in our private lives. I mean, I’m not a flamboyant type of person at all. I’ve very reserved, but Ralph had this image of being a flamboyant person. He had an afro hair cut when he came and he would gyrate a lot on that at the end of the bench and would get on officials. But privately he was as down to earth as you could be, and the thing of it is when he was hired I thought to myself, “Okay, I’ll stay here a year and I’ll find something else because this isn’t going to work.” He gave me so much responsibility right off, he trusted me, and we never had a staff meeting. We worked together for 18 years and never had a staff meeting. We would just sit down like you and I and talk. He was so easy to work with and when he came in he said “Jim, we’re going to win a national championship.” Now he didn’t say in 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, 6 years. He just said “We’re going to win one” and I thought “Yeah, okay”

DA: Talk about these people you were recruiting prior to Underhill and sort of the quality line and so forth of that.

JB: Right, well I have said this publicly many times, I felt like back in our early days, Dayton’s basketball program was the program in town. We were like the stepchild that nobody ever paid attention to us. We played in a high school gym for a while and so on and so on. So when we recruited local players, if Dayton wanted them, then we didn’t get them. We didn’t even get to talk to them, it was like that. There was Alter High School in town in Dayton was a very, very good high school basketball program, and their good players always went to Dayton. Like Jim Paxson, and I could go on and on. They had several good players from Alter that went on and played at UD. Well, there was this young man, Bob Shaffer, who we recruited, he was 6 foot 6.

DA: From Alter?

JB: From Alter High School, he was their best player.

DA: Was UD recruiting him?

JB: Oh, UD was recruiting him, Miami was recruiting him, and we were recruiting him. And we got him, he signed with us, and I felt like at the time that this was a huge deal for us.

DA: What year was that, roughly?

JB: Gosh, that's a good question. He played a year for Marcus so it would have been '77 or '78, somewhere in there. I think he might have played one or two years with Marcus and then the rest with Coach Underhill. Everybody knew Bob was the best player at Alter, and for us to get him was a huge coup for us because it gave us credibility. It gave us credibility in the Dayton area, and then as time went on we were able to get Bill Edwards who was the all-time leading scorer, he was a local player.

DA: Where is he from, Middletown?

JB: He went to Carlisle High School, and there's an interesting story about him. I was in my office one day and I got a phone call from a gentleman who I didn't have any idea who this guy was. He's just going on and on talking about these two players down at Carlisle High School. He was telling me how great they are, this and that, and I had lived in Dayton all my life and Carlisle is an all-white community, and I know this and I'm listening to this guy like "okay", and I said, "Sir, I don't know you and I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but we're in a situation here right now where we'd really like to recruit an African-American player to even out our squad." And he said "Well, they are African-American." I had been talking to the guy for 10 minutes and he had been telling me how good these guys were, and then I said to the guy, "Have you seen them?" I mean, what a stupid statement to make after he had been saying all this. So, he of course said yes, and I knew the coach there really well, and I called the coach right away and I asked him, "How in the world did you get these two guys to come to Carlisle?" I'll never forget what he said, he said "Jim, it's like a Godsend". Because the year before that they had won two games, and now they were like 16 and 3 because they had Bill and his brother. So I immediately went down there and watched them practice that night.

DA: So he was flying under the radar?

JB: He was flying under the radar and he was being recruited in football. Georgia Tech offered him a scholarship as a wide receiver. A lot of people, a lot of coaches, felt like Bill didn't play hard, and I viewed it this way, I looked at it like he is so talented that it looks like he's not playing hard, but he is playing hard. That was my perception, that's how I viewed him. So we immediately started recruiting Bill, and this was the interesting part of the story, and I tell Bill this, Bill and I have talked several times about this. If I called him on the phone and if I didn't talk, there was no conversation. He was so shy, he just wouldn't talk! And so you never knew. You would call him and you'd talk with him and think "Well, he's not interested." Because he would never say anything. It was very frustrating, so anyway, one day I called him and he said he was going to Bowling Green, because they were going to let him play football.

DA: He was going to play football and basketball?

JB: Yeah, and I said "Bill, they're not going to let you do that" and he said, "Oh yeah, Coach Brown, they're going to let me play both." I said "Billy, they're not going to do that." Well, he insisted they were, so that was the end of it. So a couple of weeks went by.

Now Billy had a brother, Robert, who was not quite as good academically, we couldn't recruit him for academic reasons, but he was good enough player to play college basketball. So a couple weeks went by and we get a phone call from the superintendent at Carlisle, and both Coach Underhill and I knew the guy, not through Billy, but through a different situation. He was wanted us to help Robert get a scholarship to a junior college. I said to him "Well, why don't you call Bowling Green. That's where Bill is going."

DA: Yeah, yeah

JB: He says to me, "Billy's not going to Bowling Green." I said, "I just talked to him a couple of weeks ago and he was going to Bowling Green!" He said, "No, Jim, he's not going to Bowling Green." So, to make a long story short, five days later we signed Billy to a scholarship.

DA: What happened to Bowling Green?

JB: I don't know. To this day, I don't know. I never asked Bill about it, but anyway, he signed with us.

DA: And the rest was history

JB: Yeah.

DA: So, Ralph took over in '78. What was your job? You said he gave you a lot of responsibilities. What was your job working with Ralph?

JB: Well, recruiting, coaching on the floor. I never had to look at him. It's funny, when I was coaching with Marcus Jackson, Marcus brought an assistant coach with him. I'm not going to mention names but he brought an assistant with him and every time the assistant would say something he would glance over at Marcus to see if it was okay. That always bothered me, and you know the players see that. I never had to worry about that with Ralph. If I said something in practice I never had to worry about anything. Even if he didn't agree with me, he wasn't going to make an issue of it. He was just so easy to work with. But I did a lot of recruiting. One of the big things you asked me about, the steps of the program, one of the big things that happened was when we first started the program, scholarship money was dollars. So, we had so many dollars to work with, and as you know, you have out-of-state tuition. So, if we recruited an out-of-state student we really used up our dollars, and so we didn't recruit out of state at all. We just didn't do it. So, we recruited Ohio. I went to Youngstown, never had any luck in Youngstown, I went to Cleveland and didn't have luck. I was going all over the state. Then, and I don't know exactly when it was, it was before Coach Underhill got here or at least shortly after he got here, that they made the decision that you're just going to have a scholarship, whether it's in-state or out-of-state, it doesn't matter, it's a scholarship.

DA: So, you had X number of scholarships.

JB: Yes.

DA: And prior to that, some kids were a partial scholarship, and some were a full scholarship, and then after that it was all full scholarship?

JB: Yes and it was a process. In fact, we had a young man by the name of Lyle Faulkner who we had recruited, giving him a thousand dollars, and we went down and played Miami of Ohio, and he had a great game and Miami came after him. So we had to immediately give him a full scholarship just to keep him. So, that was the period you were going through, you had so many. When we went to full scholarships, where it didn't matter whether it was in-state or out-of-state, it made a big difference, because it opened a door where you could go to Louisville, you could go to Indiana, and so we had tremendous success in Indiana. Then we started recruiting- I think the biggest thing we did when Coach Underhill came, because we'd never done this on any kind of scale, was we started recruiting junior college players. At that time, if you were a Division II school, you had a distinct advantage over Division I schools when it came to junior college players, because at the Division I level, the player had to graduate from the junior college. At the Division II level, he had to have 72 transferable degree credits, so what you had happen a lot of times is a guy would have one course short of graduating. Maybe there was one class that he just couldn't handle, a math class or whatever. We went after those types of players that were good students, but maybe they had 72 hours and they might have needed 80 hours to graduate or whatever. Those are the kind of players we went after and we had a lot of success. On our national championship in '83, Gary Monroe was a junior college transfer, Anthony Bias was a junior college transfer, and Freddy Moore. They were all good enough students, so that was a big advantage that we had, and that changed when Coach Underhill came. We had recruited a junior college player prior to Ralph coming, but we really concentrated on them when he came.

DA: Seems to have a lot of success with foreign players, too.

JB: Yeah, we did. Well, that was later on. Under NCAA rules, you're permitted to take your team to Europe every four years, and what we did is we had a friend in Cincinnati who was kind of like an agent, a sports agent, and he would bring teams from foreign countries over here to play exhibition games. Now, you can't do this anymore, but at this time you could bring a foreign team over here, they would play an exhibition game...

DA: Against Wright State?

JB: Against Wright State, and so we signed a contract, his name was George Spencer, he was an agent out of Cincinnati, and he had a company that would bring teams over, and in exchange for that, if you did that over a four-year period, then you got a free trip to Europe. All expenses paid. So, we did that. It might cost you- I'm not sure, I'm just guessing here- maybe five thousand dollars if you brought the team from Yugoslavia or wherever, you gave them five thousand dollars, and after four years you get your trip. Believe it or not, we got a 24-day trip to Europe, this would have been in the '91-'92 season. We were in Germany for seven days, we went to Holland for seven days, we went to Belgium for three or four days and then we finished up at Paris, France. We

played ten games. It was too long, you know, 24 days with teenagers that have girlfriends, it was tough. But it was an unbelievable trip, and what happened was Ralph and I became really good friends with the gentleman in Holland who ran their Olympic program. To the extent that he wanted to know if we could bring players from Holland to the United States that wanted to play basketball. So, we did. The first player we brought over here was Mike Nahar, and Mike was on that national championship team- no, I mean on the NCAA team, the team that went to the tournament in 1993.

DA: Wasn't there a big center from Egypt or something like that?

JB: Well, that was later, after I was gone. Yeah, there was. But that's how that all got started, through our friendship with- his name was Vladimir Hagar, and I even brought a couple of high school kids over here and had to place them in high schools, and there's a funny story here because we brought this young man over here, his name was Marco Pikar, and he came from Holland. He was supposedly one of Holland's finest basketball players and he was 6' foot 9". I had to find a high school that would take him and find somebody to house him, and so Beavercreek was where we selected. I didn't really know the coach at Beavercreek that well at the time, my son later on played for him, but at that time I didn't know him that well. But I put him there, and of course the word spread, I mean everybody knew this kid- six foot nine, big body, from Holland- was at Beavercreek High School. Bobby Knight came over and looked at him and so on and so on. So anyway, I go watch him play three or four times, and I just don't think he's good enough. I remember telling Ralph, "Ralph, he's not good enough to play for us." So, we quit recruiting him, and I'll never forget this, because I was walking out of the Nutter Center one day-

DA: And what year was this roughly?

JB: Gosh, this would have been in the early 90's, and Page Mulhollan, who was our president, had worked out in the Nutter Center and he was walking out, and he saw me and yelled to me, so I go over and he says, "Jim, what happened?" and I said, "What do you mean?" and he said "Well that player you brought over here from Holland, he went to UD! What happened?" I said "Well, we didn't think he was good enough", and he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "That's good enough for me!"

DA: Did he turn out to be anything?

JB: No, he went to UD, he signed a scholarship. Great kid. I mean just a great kid and he was there for four years, but he never turned out to be the type of player everyone thought he would be. But that's how our foreign connection started.

DA: So, talk about the arc of the growth of it. Ralph takes over, the program is going great, what was the attitude on campus toward the team? Did they come to games and stuff like that?

JB: Yeah, well, we played in the PE building, which is now the bookstore, and we played in there for a significant period of time. And yeah, it was packed! There were nights when it wasn't packed, but there were nights where you couldn't get in. It seated about 2,800. When Mike Cusack became the athletic director in '83 they put in some special seats, chair back seats, so it wasn't all bleachers. But we played in there for a significant period of time and the program thrived. We won the national championship, and to me that's one of the-

DA: '83 is when you won the championship?

JB: That's one of the most amazing things to me, that thirteen years after we started the program totally from scratch, we won the national championship. That's unheard of. So, basketball was a big deal on campus. It was a big deal, and when Page Mulhollan came, he came from Arizona State, and I think he had a lot to do with the athletic program there. I know he did because Arizona State had been put on probation, and when Paige came here he made it perfectly clear that if there was any cheating going on, you better have your resignation on his desk the next day. He was very supportive of athletics and, you know, the Nutter Center I think is the single most important thing that's happened on this campus.

DA: So, when did the team go to Division I?

JB: '88? '87-'88?

DA: Can you talk about that decision?

JB: Well, we were to the point where we were actually playing some Division I teams-

DA: I know you played Louisville one year, right?

JB: We played Louisville the year we won the national championship, and we had played Bowling Green-

DA: We won a national championship, did Louisville win the national championship?

JB: No, they went to the Final Four and got beat in the championship game. Our game down in Louisville was a very competitive game. I think we ended up losing by 14 points, but it was very competitive. We could play with them, I mean, it wasn't a blowout. We were down there, and we were very representative. It was the only game we lost during that stretch. We got beat at home by- and it's amazing, that year we were 10 and 0, then played Central State in the PE building, and they beat us by 20 points. Then we lost another game in overtime later on, and then we won a game down at Kentucky Wesleyan on a last second shot and that turned our season around. From that point on we just got better and better and better, and we ended up winning the national championship. But winning the national championship really just exploded the basketball program in terms of, you know, it gave you instant recognition, you were thought of. It helped our

recruiting because we went to New York City and got a couple players out of New York City, which we had never done before.

DA: '88 then is Division I?

JB: Yeah, I think it was '87-'88 when we went Division I.

DA: And you couldn't be in a conference for a couple of years, right?

JB: Oh, it killed us. Because when we went Division I, the concern that Coach Underhill and I had- and it kind of turned out to be true, it took a while- is we had the players to go Division I, I mean, we were good enough to compete on the floor. But what Ralph and I's concern was, do we have the infrastructure? Like, do we have a full time strength coach? Do we have a full time academic advisor?

DA: Does the university have a full commitment. You had a few coaches, but does the university?

JB: We shared a secretary with 17 other coaches, you know? But the impetus to do to Division I was real, and we made that move. For the first several years, if you look at the results those first several years, we were pretty good. We had several really good seasons, but it really caught up with us. We no longer had that huge advantage that we had as Division II, and we lost some kids to academics that we had worked really hard to get, and I know that if we had a full time academic advisor that would have never happened. Or we could send kids to summer school, like they do now. Now, they have a full time academic advisor, they send kids to summer school, all of those things have occurred. Which is good, I'm not complaining. I'm just saying at that time, we didn't have any of those things.

DA: You were still not quite up to other Division I schools. But you were playing UD at that time, right?

JB: We played UD, as soon as we went to Division I, UD agreed to play us. We played on a Saturday afternoon and got obliterated, we lost by 24 or 25 points. But they agreed to play us and that kind of started the "Gem City Jam". We played I think eight times, they beat us five, we beat them three. Great atmosphere.

DA: Talk about that for a while, so you were in the same conference even as UD?

JB: No, no. They had gotten out of the conference when we got into it.

DA: When Xavier was in the conference, right?

JB: Yes, Xavier was in a conference.

DA: Which was, what was that?

JB: It was called The Mid-Continent, but it changed names. There was Midwestern Cities Conference, then it went to the Mid-Continent Conference. Xavier was in that league, yeah.

DA: So, UD kind of welcoming playing for eight years, and then what happened?

JB: I don't know, and I get asked this question all the time, "Why don't they have the Gem City Jam?" It's really sad. I think it's a money thing. I think there's two big issues. The basketball program at UD is their cash cow. They have to have a successful basketball program because that's how their athletic program is supported. They don't have big TV contracts, they're not in a big-time league, so to speak, they are in the Atlantic 10, which is a good league, but it's not the Big East and it's not the Big 10, so they don't get a huge amount of revenue. So, they have to play home games, and because of that, they don't want to go across town and play on the road and relinquish that money that they're going to get with a home game. That's part of it. The other thing is, this is sad, but I think there is this perception that if they come over and lose to Wright State that it's going to diminish they're standing in the community.

DA: That it would bleed fans to Wright State in a way.

JB: Yeah, and that's not going to happen. I mean, the first time we beat them, which was in 1990, we beat them at their place 101-99, they had a good team. That team went to the NCAA tournament and won a game, and we beat them on their home floor, and it didn't hurt their program. So, I know Wright State would love to resume the series, I think it will be resumed someday, but I don't see it happening soon. There has been a renewed interest because Wright State having a good season this year, and one of UD's things has been "Well, we don't want to play you because your RPI is so low", which is just an excuse, that doesn't have anything to do with it. But, I mean, I think it will happen again. It's too good of a... I mean, Cincinnati plays Xavier, Kentucky plays Louisville, it's interesting, Dan, the only reason Kentucky and Louisville play each other is because the governor got involved. For years they didn't play each other and then the governor finally said, "Hey, look, you're going to play."

DA: Well, the thing of it is, Wright State's just got to win. They've got to elevate or at least be equal to the RPI of UD. Then, I think, public demand will dictate that. So, Ralph was here from '83- I'm sorry, '78, in '83 you win the national championship, 1988 you go to Division I, 1990 the Nutter Center is built, and talk about it from that point on a little bit.

JB: Well, it was an exciting time because we had a president that was very supportive of basketball in Paige Mulhollan. He took a lot of heat from faculty members here, I don't know if you remember that.

DA: From building the Nutter Center? No, I wasn't here then.

JB: Yeah, it was not good. The faculty felt like every penny that was being spent on the Nutter Center was coming directly out of their pockets.

DA: And was that the time when there was an increased sort of tension between some faculty and Paige?

JB: The Nutter Center was very controversial.

DA: So that sort of triggered it

JB: But he stuck by his guns, and I will say to this day, I think in a lot of ways is the single most important thing that happened on this campus, in terms of promoting the campus. Because you have all these people who would come to these events here that would never come onto our campus.

DA: Oh, sure. Not to mention the economic impact of restaurants and hotels and everything around here.

JB: And just for the university. The state volleyball tournament has been held here for years, the wrestling tournament was held here for several years.

DA: Before the Schottenstein Center was built, right?

JB: You bring all these students and fans to the campus that would never have come to our campus, and so they see it and they say, "Hey, that might be where I might want to send my son or daughter, or where I want to go to college" So the Nutter Center was really... and it was exciting to come down and watch them build it.

DA: And the first couple games, holy maceral!

JB: The first game we played in it, we played Tennessee State, and we trailed the whole game, and it was nervousness because we were a better team than Tennessee State, but we just were nervous and had a huge crowd, a sold-out crowd, and we won the game on the last second tip in by Sean Hammons.

DA: What game was it where the guy was falling out of bounds?

JB: That happened was the game we played at Kentucky Wesleyan.

DA: Oh, that was still back in D-II. Oh, alright.

JB: That was the play that kind of brought our team together. We were playing Kentucky Wesleyan, and Kentucky Wesleyan was a great basketball team. We had a sold-out crowd down there, and they were shooting a free throw with a 1 point lead, and he missed the free throw, and we came down the floor and Tom Holzapfel took a shot from the top of the key. This was before the 3-point basket, and he missed it and the ball took a crazy

bounce, and our point guard, Mike Grote, just caught it with one hand, threw it up to the basket, and it went in.

DA: And he was kind of falling out of bounds then.

JB: Falling out of bounds, I mean, he could do it a thousand times and it would never happen again, and it went in. We were going to come home after the game, we had checked out of our hotel rooms and were going to get into the bus and come home, we had so many fans down there, it was such a chaotic thing. We decided we were going back to the hotel and checked back into our rooms and stayed all night, and it just brought our team together. It propelled us.

DA: That's wonderful. And so many great stories, so many great things happened, you and Ralph guiding the program from the nineties. It seems like the last two years things started to tail off.

JB: Yeah, there's a lot of reasons for that.

DA: And we're talking maybe starting in '93 or something like that?

JB: Well, we were in a league, finally. Finally, we got in the Mid-Continent League, and to this day, I think if we would have been in a league when we went to Division I, that was the only thing that in hindsight you wish would have happened. That when we went Division I, we got in a league.

DA: And there was no rule about not being in a league?

JB: No, it's just we couldn't get in one. For whatever reason, we just couldn't get in one. So, we kind of felt like we were stuck there, an independent. For four or five years we had good records, but we couldn't even get a smell of the NIT, nothing. I honestly think what happened was, these auxiliary things I've talked about caught up with us. They just caught up with us.

DA: You didn't have the infrastructure.

JB: No.

DA: So, you couldn't do the academic advising, and you couldn't coach-

JB: We had an academic advisor, but she was the academic advisor for everybody. It really wasn't until Coach Underhill was let go, and I had an interview, and I spelled things out to the committee, these are things that have to be done, whether I got the job or someone else got the job. These are the things that are going to have to be done if we're going to build a program here. All of those things came to fruition, they got an academic advisor, they got a full-time strength coach, and I don't have any regrets about that. But that I think hurt us.

DA: So, did you enjoy your year as head coach?

JB: Well, it was a very trying year

DA: And that was in '96? That was my first year, '96.

JB: It was a very trying year because- to review it, we had gone through a couple of tough years, and our best player, Vitaly Potapenko, goes pro. The reason he went pro, a lot of people don't understand. We had a president at the time, Harley Flack, who for whatever reason, made it difficult for Vitaly. As a foreign student at Wright State, you are required to take the TOEFL test, the Test of English as a Foreign Language. Vitaly spoke English but not fluently when he came, so they would admit him provisionally. He took the test- they admitted him provisionally, so Vitaly took the test and got a 400 on it, which is 100 points below.

DA: You need a 500?

JB: You need a 500, so we got him some help, he went to classes to prepare for the test. He took it again, and it was right at the end of what would have been his junior year, he took the test and got a 495. President Flack wrote him a letter and said he has one month to get a 500, or he gets dismissed from the university.

DA: You wouldn't think they would kick him out of school?

JB: Yeah.

DA: After 2 years?

JB: After 2 years. Yeah, and he was academically eligible. He was fine. I don't know why he felt this way, but anyway, Vitaly put his name in the NBA draft. He just said, "Heck with it, I'm going to go to the NBA." He had no intentions of doing that. So, that started the process, and then Coach Underhill, he went to Chicago for the conference media day, and he came back and stopped at Meijer's-

DA: Fall of '96.

JB: -and he was arrested for allegedly shoplifting, and the university decided to terminate him. And so here I was-

DA: Was it just some kind of accident or something or?

JB: Well, Ralph and I would go to lunch, numerous times, and he would forget his billfold. It's kind of a funny thing. I would never wear sweatpants, because you can't put your billfold in it. Yeah! Your stuff just falls out of your pockets! So, I would just never wear them, I would wear regular pants. Maybe I'd wear a sweat top, but never pants. He

would always wear sweatpants, and so we would go to lunch a lot of times and he'd forget his wallet, and I would pay for it and he would pay me back. I don't know what happened, I really don't know. I mean, Ralph ended up getting acquitted from the charges, and he got a settlement from Meijer because... it was a bad deal. But I think the university overreacted and terminated him, and it just threw things into a chaotic thing. I was named the interim coach, we didn't have a Vitaly, we were playing arguably the toughest schedule in the history of the program, we played Kentucky, we played Louisville, we played five Mid-American schools, we played UD, and we did all this because-

DA: A game I remember clearly was Toledo, because I had just come from Toledo. I remember we led that whole game, and I was thinking "Wow!", and then somehow in the last two minutes we lost the game by like 73 -71.

JB: Well, I started three freshmen, a sophomore and a junior, and we just, you're right, and we had numerous games like that. Our UD game we lost at the end. We lost I think 10 games by like 7 points or less. It was just that you had no experience. We played Louisville down in Louisville and lost by 4. I mean we were very competitive in a lot of games, but it was just the fact that you started three freshmen, a sophomore and a junior and sometimes a senior. But it was a very difficult year for me, and I can remember at the end of the year saying to my wife, I said "You know, if things don't change here, even if I get the job, it's going to be difficult", because of what I've said before, the things you need to have to be successful. I mean, I look now, and the coaching staff has like five assistants. And I'm not complaining, but it's just different today. It's just totally different.

DA: Ironically, probably, it all changed after you guys left, after you and Ralph left. You know, it didn't change just like that, but it started to change.

JB: Right, right.

DA: But none of them had the success you and Ralph had.

JB: I know, I know, and you can't go back and change things, but I do think the way Ralph was treated, and then what happened to me and then some other things, I think it really did impact our attendance. I don't think we've fully recovered from that.

DA: There was an emotional connection to you and Ralph, right?

JB: There was, there really was. We were kind of like the perfect couple. I mean, I tell people this, Ralph never had written a letter in 18 years. Every letter that went out of that office with his name on it, I wrote. But it was because we each had strengths, I was very well organized, I was extremely organized, and that was something he didn't care about. I mean, when we first met the first time, he opened his billfold and he had all these little scraps of paper, and he said, "This is my recruiting list, Jim." But when it came to X's and O's, when it came to recruiting, when it came to finishing a deal with a player-people have asked me many, many times, "How were you able to schedule some of the

people you schedule?” Well, it was because of Ralph. He was likeable, so he would call somebody up on the phone who had no intentions to coming to Wright State and playing, and before the conversation ended he would’ve talked them into coming to play. He was just that kind of person. So, we had a...

DA: A great time.

JB: Yeah.

DA: So, you leave Wright State and you go onto great success at Northmont?

JB: Yeah, I did.

DA: How did that happen?

JB: Well, that’s kind of funny, because Jack Butler was on our staff, and he was an assistant coach at UD for years, and when that coaching staff under Coach Donoher-

DA: Jack went to Career Services, afterwards? Wright State Career Services?

JB: Well, when he came to Wright State he was hired as the academic advisor, and we lost a coach, Ralph and I lost a coach, and we both thought about Jack, because Jack was just down the hallway from us. I can remember Paige Mulhollan was the president at the time, and he told Jack- because the coaching position offered more money, the assistant coaching position was more money than he was doing as academic advisor. So, Paige told him, “Look, I don’t want you to take that job because it’s more money, I will increase your salary as academic advisor, if that’s what you want. I don’t want you to do it for the money.” Well, he still took the coaching job, because that’s what he wanted to do. So anyway, when all that happened and we weren’t rehired, Jack and I, our contracts were such that they were going to pay us for another year. So, we rented an office together, and Jack lived in Englewood, and he told me one day, “Jim, the basketball coaching job at Northmont High School opened up. You would be great” I said, “I don’t think I want to do that”, and it was kind of funny that I felt that way, because I still teach the coaching class here at Wright State for kids that want to be coaches, they take this class, and I’ve always said in that class that it would be so much fun to coach at a school where kids from the third grade- I don’t know if you’ve gone to a high school game north of town, like Versailles or St. Henry. You go to one of those games and you see 4th graders and 5th graders and 6th graders in their shirts, and they get out on the floor when the team comes in-

DA: A real community thing.

JB: Real community thing, and when I would go to some of those games when I was recruiting I would just think it was so cool, so I thought that would be something that I would really like to do. Well, Northmont was kind of that way, and here I was saying no. Jack just kept pestering me and pestering me, and finally I sent a letter to them, but they

had already hired somebody, so that was the end of that. So, about two months later I get a phone call from the athletic director, saying that their coach had resigned suddenly and if I would be interesting. So, I went out, and the principal at this time, a guy I had went to college with together and had played basketball together at UD, I knew him, and I took the job.

DA: What year was that?

JB: That was 1997, and I was there for sixteen years.

DA: Wow. Did you teach there as well?

JB: No. No, and I told them right away, I said, “I’m not going to teach, I just want to coach”, and they were fine with that, they were really fine with that and didn’t have any questions about that. The program was really in disarray, they won four games the year before, and I didn’t know anything about them. I never had gone to the school and never recruited anybody from the school. But when I got out there, I really embraced getting kids interested in basketball, so I made it a point to start a basketball camp. They had never had a basketball camp, I started a basketball camp. I really embraced when the 7th or 8th grade kids went down, because what I thought I had to do was I have to get kids interested in basketball, because it hasn’t been the case here. So, it took a couple of years, The first year we won ten games and the second year we won eleven, and then after that we were very, very successful. We never got to the state, but it was difficult because in this part of the country you’ve got to go down and play those Cincinnati schools.

DA: So, what was your record as a coach there?

JB: I don’t know, I have winningest record there in the history of the school, but I don’t know. We had some seasons where we were 22 -4, 21-3. We had 16 consecutive winning seasons. Or 14, sorry. The first 2 seasons we were really close, we had 10-11, and 11-12, and then after that every season was a winning season. I was really, really proud of that, because we had never done that in the history of the program, never had that kind of success. It was fun, it was different. I have been asked many times what the difference between coaching in college and coaching in high school, I always say the difference is I didn’t have to worry about what I was going to watch on the 11 o’clock news as a high school coach, because mom and dad were responsible for the kid. Where as a college coach, you felt like you were responsible if they were in any trouble.

DA: And how did you get to the radio?

JB: Well, what happened was I decided the last year I was coaching at Northmont, the person, Tom Michaels, he was our broadcaster when I was coaching here. He was the radio broadcaster for Wright State, and he was now occasionally doing high schools games for the Piqua radio station. Troy-Christian was going to be playing in the state tournament, and he says “Hey, Jim, will you come up and do this game with me? I’d love to have you.” So, I went up and did the state tournament game, and we’re driving back

and he looked at me and said, “I know you’re still coaching, you don’t have time, but if you”-, and I’m thinking in my mind, you know, yeah, I may be quitting, this might be it, - “I’d love to have you do games with me”. So, that’s what happened. I retired at Northmont, Tom found out about it, he calls me on the phone and said, “I was serious about you doing games with me”, and so that next year I started doing games on this Piqua radio station.

DA: Doing high school games?

JB: High school games, Tuesday nights, Friday nights. Well, Wright State found out I was doing that, and they approached me about would I be interested in doing some [games]. I said sure, so I ended up doing I think their last 12 games that year, and I’ve done it ever since.

DA: So how long have you been doing it now then?

JB: This I think this is my fourth year, I enjoy it, it’s fun.

DA: Well you are very good at it, you don’t have any formal training or anything right?

JB: No, except having said that, all the years I would coach with Coach Underhill, I did the post-game radio show. Most of the time the head coaches do the post-game radio show, but Ralph wanted me to do it, and so I did the post-game radio show all those years, and that helped. You know, all you are doing is talking about something that you love.

DA: Well, I think the stability that you bring, where they had people taking turns and stuff. And of course, Chris, or Dave, or Chris now, is a real pro.

JB: Oh, he is great.

DA: And you bring in the expert knowledge and stuff, and it is a perfect blend, you know, the color commentator and the play-by-play.

JB: Yes, Chris is very good. He is so easy to work with, he is great.

DA: So, what’s your sense of the state of Wright State basketball these days?

JB: I think it’s headed in the right direction, I really do. I really like this coaching staff a lot, and it’s just little things, and I didn’t know Coach Nagy at all, didn’t know him at all, and I was really good friends with Billy Donlon. I like Billy, I think Billy did a good job here, things didn’t work out for whatever reason, but when Coach Nagy was hired I didn’t really know anything about him. I knew his dad, I had coached against his dad, his dad was a long-time coach at Illinois with Lou Henson, and then when I got to know him was when he went to UIC, he was an assistant coach at UIC for 5 or 6 years, and we played UIC every year. So I didn’t know him very well, but I knew him. He reminds me

so much of Coach Underhill because he lets his assistants coach. I mean if you go to a practice, you'll see Coach Nagy, he's sort of like a football coach. You know, a football coach has an offensive coordinator, he has a defensive coordinator, and he has an offensive line coach and a receiver's coach. He kind of oversees everything.

DA: Coaching from up in the tower.

JB: Up in the tower, and Coach Nagy will be like that in practice. He will allow Coach Cooley to do this, and Coach Chambliss to do this, and then his interactions with his players. The one thing I was concerned about when this staff came on was recruiting, because recruiting is all contacts. It's just all contacts, and if people think that it's anything else, it's not. It's contacts. I think that's why Ralph and I were so successful here is because we were here for such a long time, that's very unusual for a coach to stay at one school. In fact, toward the end of my career I was the second longest active coach that stayed at one university. The only other one was a guy at North Carolina, Bill Guthridge. I think when you have that kind of stability it really helps you and I was concerned about it because these guys were all from South Dakota and they didn't know anybody here.

DA: Right, Right.

JB: I thought, you know, how is this going to work? But their personalities are such and then this recruiting class coming in, they have a player from Bowling Green, Kentucky, they have one from over near St. Louis, one from Wisconsin, and they have one from Cincinnati Moeller. So obviously, they've worked really, really hard to develop those contacts, and they've had some success. Their recruiting class is outstanding, I mean, I've seen a couple of the kids play and the future is really bright. Now, what's got to happen is the fan base has got to come back and that's going to take some time. There's a lot of reasons that the fanbase has kind of gone away, and the thing that has always bothered me, because we dealt with this when I was coaching here, is everything here is compared with UD. People don't realize this, but UD's basketball program is unique. It is thought of much higher in the Dayton area than it is outside of the Dayton area. If you go to Chicago or St. Louis, they don't know anything about what's going on at Dayton. I mean, they don't know that they have that kind of crowd at every game. So everything at Wright State is compared to that, where it's so unfair, because if you compare our program with Ohio U, Bowling Green, Miami-

DA: Toledo-

JB: Toledo. We're right there. Our attendance is good. Now, this year has been kind of down, I just hope it comes back. I mean, the last year I coached we had good crowds, and we only won seven games, and we had pretty good crowds. Things happen, people got upset, people left the program. And once you do that, if you don't have a season ticket, you've got to make a conscious decision to go to the game. If you have a season ticket, you're going to go, because it's on your calendar and you're going to go. That's where the problem lies, and I've talked to coach Nagy about this, and he says, "You've got to

win first”, and he’s right. Winning has got to occur, now we have won, and it will be interesting to see.

DA: You know, it’s interesting, really since ’96, since you guys... it’s been unstable. Going through coaches, whether they were terminated or left on their own, like what’s his name and Clemson. It’s just been unstable.

JB: It has, and you not only have to have stability in your head coach, but you have to have stability with your program. I mean, you got to have players that stay four years, you’ve got to have coaches that stay in the program, because that’s how you have some stability. You know, assistant coaches do the recruiting, the head coach gets the credit for it, but the assistant coaches are the ones who go out there and find the players.

DA: You know, Nagy has guys that have been with him for a long time.

JB: Yeah.

DA: Now he’s got a new guy, so it’s very stable, and he strikes me as... he’s not a guy who is just looking for the next big thing.

JB: No, I get a kick out of that. People say, “Well, he’ll win and then he’ll leave.” He isn’t going to leave.

DA: I don’t think he wants to. I think he’s more interested in his family and planting roots and staying somewhere.

JB: It’s funny because when I first met him, I thought, “Oh, gosh, this is going to be difficult”, because I’ve got to interview him after every game. He’s very quiet, he doesn’t talk much, but it’s funny, Coach Cooley, who is an assistant coach, was telling me the other day, he said “My mom watched the coaches show last week”, because they stream it live and you can get it. She said, “Oh my gosh, Coach Nagy seems so much more comfortable with Coach Brown and Chris Collins.” He said to her, “Well, that’s because he really likes those two guys.”

DA: Well, you can tell! In fact, if you watch his early interviews it’s kind of stilted, but now he’s loquacious.

JB: Yes, he is and I don’t blame him. He didn’t know anybody here, and he certainly didn’t know me and Chris. But yeah, he’s been great. He’s still not as talkative as some people, but in his own little way. But he can coach. I’ve been around him enough now to know that he can coach, and how he conducts practices, it’s just great. I mean there’s no yelling and no screaming and no cussing. It’s just pleasant to be around.

DA: Well, you know, anything you want to talk about or mention as we wrap things up here?

JB: No, it's just my 27 years at Wright State were great. I still teach a coaching class, and I don't know how much longer I want to do it, but I enjoy it. Being involved in the program, I'm really the only one left.

DA: Well, we really appreciate you participating in this program and you're a real pioneer of this place. I know the university is going through some struggles now, but it's come a long way from 1967 and the 50 years. It's particularly interesting talking that we're talking to you in the 50th year, because you helped build this place, and sometimes coaches who aren't head coaches are overlooked. But your long-term commitment as a coach, and even now again as a color commentator,

JB: It's funny, I parked over in the visitor's parking lot, I walked through the Student Union, and I walked down the hallway there, and I looked and where our first office was, our first office was in the bottom of the Student Union. The Guardian is there now-

DA: The students organizations, yeah.

JB: -and the student radio station, and it brings back memories. Because the PE building used to have a big concrete ramp that went up to the front of it. When they enclosed that whole area, it's changed so dramatically, and they've done a wonderful job with the Student Union, that is a marvelous building now. I hadn't been in it for a long time, and I'm going to walk back that way and explore a little bit more, but it's really neat to see what's taken place since I've started here.

DA: Thank you Jim!

JB: Thank you, I've enjoyed it!