



“I went through my undergrad at the University of New Mexico and we were still playing sports days although I can remember playing some AAU basketball. AAU Nationals were held in Gallop, New Mexico and because our team had won states, we got to go. I can remember coming back to school and two of my teammates were kicked out of school because they had competed and that was so socially unacceptable. Some teachers thought I might have a little intelligence and decided to back me up and keep me in school, but the other two got kicked out. That had a huge impact on me and made me want to really pursue competitive sports.

I started out coaching in junior high school. I’ll never forget – we started a program there and had a game and the opposing coach called a timeout. I thought, “I don’t have anything to say in a timeout. I don’t even know what I’m doing!” I decided then I needed to go someplace to find out how to coach. At the time there were very few programs that endorsed competitive sports for women, whether it was a sports day or a real game.

Illinois State in the mid-sixties had some of the most profound leaders in the profession. Phebe Scott at the time was president of the DGWS, the Division of Girls and Women in Sports, and that was the group that was really looking into the possibility of competitive opportunities for women. Laurie Mabry was soon to be president of the AIAW, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, and there were some other national leaders in the state of Illinois teaching at Illinois State. I decided to come to Illinois State for my master’s degree so off I went, just to learn how to coach. Well, when I got here, it became apparent that the people that were coaching didn’t know a heck of a whole lot more than I did because they were all trained as physical educators and didn’t have coaching skills, had never been coached themselves.

And except for one year in seventh grade, I truly hadn’t been either so it was kind of learn as you go. We were limited in the late sixties to four and a half hours practice a week. It moved up to six hours/week my year as a graduate assistant but that definitely limited what you could and couldn’t do. It was just a totally different perspective then and probably for the first ten years of my coaching career, I coached on emotion. “Come on, play hard, be aggressive!” I didn’t really know the skills; I had no idea how to break down skills. We taught an offense but never taught a technique.

Until 1978. I was asked to coach the Junior National Team and I was flattered to death but once I got to the sports festival, I realized that I didn’t know what I was doing. I listened to other coaches that were there – there were several men and women coaches – and I’ll never forget. We were discussing some things on defense and I didn’t really understand it and spoke up, and Pat Head Summitt took me into another gym and showed me actual breakdown drills. That was the first time in my life I had ever seen anything broken down. From that point on, I really learned the game, learned it from lots of other people, and figured things out myself to a degree.

But even in the late seventies, we were still not in the competitive stage we are in now. We didn't have to recruit as much, we had just started recruiting, and it was just a different game. Now, I think, college athletics have become an entertainment business and it's not the pure sport it was in the sixties and seventies. Now that scholarships are here and the media has gotten so involved in it, probably one third of my job is PR (public relations), one third recruiting, and one third of my job is on the court actually coaching. Of the on the court coaching, I think dealing with what goes through kids' heads, their understanding, their ability to focus and put things together becomes more of my job than Xs and Os. So the game has changed drastically in the thirty years I've been in it.

The pluses are when they can take something and be successful and see them get excited about it. I still get my thrills out of what happens with our athletes. Winning obviously is what it's all about. Whether the media is there or not, whether the financial rewards are there or not, I think winning is just as exciting and important now as it was thirty years ago. And I don't think you can be in the profession if that's not the primary goal.

I can remember the old days where we drove four station wagons full of kids and the kids had to drive two of them. Not many people are going to survive doing that for thirty years. Ten or fifteen years was more that I wanted to do it, to tell you the truth. Being able to travel by charter plane and having nice accommodations, those kind of things are a definite plus. With that comes a price though and the price is public scrutiny and higher expectations. Now the emphasis is no longer on the educational experience – it's on Ws and Ls period, from the administration, from fans, from parents, from yourself. The whole focus has changed. To me, that's a negative because I think learning and growing, the off the court lessons you learn are equally important in our programs but we've definitely lost our focus. I do believe how a coach operates truly preserves the educational value. If you're willing to win at all costs, if you don't emphasize the values in sport and the values in learning then I think you as a coach sell out to the big entertainment business. I still think if you're going to be coaching at a collegiate institution you have an obligation to educate your student athletes.

Illinois State has supported women's basketball very well. It's a great community; I don't have trouble selling Illinois State, there are lots of pluses, we have good facilities. I don't think the grass is greener at other institutions. There's no question that it's more difficult to recruit to an Illinois State than it would to a Michigan but no matter what level you compete, you're going to have competition for the athletes you want. I got two transfers a year ago and I was very flattered that that happened because I thought, well maybe I am doing something right and people understand what's important in our program; so that was kind of neat.

Recruiting is such a trip. There were a couple of kids I started recruiting aggressively when they were in seventh grade. They were local kids, good kids, good families, good values, and obviously they were great athletes. One went to Notre Dame and the other went to Indiana. I think regardless of how hard you work on some kids, even if it's for all the right reasons, elite institutions are always going to have the edge for that kind

of kid. The kids still stay in contact, we've got great rapport, so that's wonderful. You develop a lot of relationships in recruiting and whether you get the kid or not, it doesn't make her any less of a person. You just don't have the opportunity to coach the kid.

One of my funniest recruiting stories, I'll never forget this! I was recruiting a kid and Lisa Robinson was my assistant at the time. She went with me and it ended up being a visit at the school in the evening with the kid, the parents and the coach. We were just talking up a storm, doing our sell job, and I was in the middle of a sentence when I belched, just flat out belched. Lisa wouldn't even look at me – and I just apologized and went on. We walked out of that visit and we knew we had lost the kid. And I laughed so hard I thought I would die! Funny things happen in this business and life goes on.

The media doesn't bother me. Most of the media people I've worked with have been in it for the right reasons. They're not out to kill you, they're just trying to be honest and find a story line. The publicity doesn't bother me, the public speaking doesn't bother me although I think it's something you learn to do without being scared to death. It just takes a lot of repetition. The public scrutiny – it sits in the back of your mind. In a game like Michigan you get people to come to the game and you think, "Oh my God, I need to pay them for showing up – we stunk up the gym." That's a perspective now that we didn't have to deal with early in the seventies.

The parents at the high school level, from what I understand, the problem is huge there. The parents are driving coaches out of the game and I think that's really sad. I've had some parents at my level that I thought were out of perspective, just didn't approach things the right way. I'm pretty up front with my parents and I don't mind telling them the way it is, and if they don't like it, then they can take their daughter and leave. I think in any conflict situation whether it's with a kid, or with a parent, whether it's a parent backing a kid or a kid not being straight up with the parent – the most effective way of dealing with any conflict is to get it on the table and discuss it. Here's where I am, let me hear where you are, if there's a compromise – great. If not, that's the only way it is and we're done.

I don't believe in playing games, I'm very up front. Every year we have a parent's day and I say the same thing year after year. If you have a problem with what's going on, please, if you love your daughter, don't put your daughter between you and me, let's discuss the problem and you have to buy in to my side or I have to compromise. But we're not going to put your daughter in the middle. So far, that's been fairly effective for me. Keeping open communication with parents is critical, especially freshman parents, so they understand the system, what it's going to be like, what expectations you have, and where their kid falls into that.

I've taken all kinds of personality assessment tests – I think any coach probably has. As a social human being, I'm somewhat introverted and as a coach, I'm very extroverted. I've always thought that was kind of interesting, that you have to change your personality to be a coach. And I definitely think you have to. If anything, I have a

fear of being too soft with kids, not demanding enough. I think as you go through life, you mellow somewhat because you realize everything isn't black and white. You begin to see both sides of the picture and issues. At times it makes you ambivalent. I don't think that's a good quality in coaching. You have to be a very strong personality; you can't be ambivalent about things though you may feel a certain way. You can't be empathetic and sympathetic because you have to push kids to learn quicker and with more character than just going through a normal life. In athletics you have to learn it now or you can't survive. You have to be more demanding, kids need more discipline. Kids are getting less discipline in many homes; just learning to discipline their physical beings, much less their heads, is such a new experience for them – the demands are so great, it's a difficult transition for them.

The biggest lesson I've learned from my players is that I have to keep the communication open. Don't ever react in anger – if you are angry, walk away and then react, but above all else, keep all communication lines open. And, as a coach and an adult, I have to reach out to them for communication. I can't just invite it, I have to facilitate it. I love my kids, that's my problem. Part of the problem is they're used to being able to slop through things, and have no consequences and not be held accountable for their behavior. I'm not sure kids have changed so much over the years. As I look back, so many of them in the past have as many growing up problems as kids now, but the pressure and demands and visibility are so much greater than it ever was in the past. Everything is magnified – the pluses are magnified and so are the minuses.

I don't think you're going to see very many people who coach twenty, thirty years anymore. I think that breed is going in both men's and women's coaching. The stress is too high; even in the very best programs you have one or two losing seasons and all of a sudden the boosters are all over you, you've gone to pot and the longevity just doesn't seem possible with the schedule you have to keep. I honestly think in a mid-major school like an Illinois State, if we were being successful on a regular basis which we haven't been in the nineties, I think it's just a high pace to keep for eleven months out of the year. Our slow time is May – you can't really recruit then, you can't coach then, you've got a little breather in May and a breather for us is an eight-hour work day. The rest of the year we're into a twelve to sixteen hour work days, six days a week, and in season there's never a day off, ever.

If you have a Sunday off, you're looking at film, you're planning practice, you're dealing with kids, recruits, there's just no way to get away from it. August, you can't work with your kids but you're on the phone the entire time, talking to recruits, talking to coaches, you're working your tail off trying to get kids signed. There's just no down time. That's what's difficult if people want to have families and have a personal life. I think that's very difficult in this profession. It takes an extremely understanding mate to deal with that, somebody that is willing to accept that life style, and that's for male coaches and female coaches both. Your support system in this business are your friends and your family. It's critical, frankly. I've been fortunate to have both. I have a lot of friends who are in the athletic world and understand what

goes on. Because they are my friends, they will adjust to my social calendar. I don't think people outside the profession have as good a feel for that as people who are in it.

My family has been phenomenal. They're totally oblivious to what really goes on but really cute. If something goes wrong my brother, my mother, my nieces are on the phone, "Are you ok?" At least you know they're there for you, no matter what. You have to have that. I think a lot of people, especially young women, struggle because they don't have the time to exist in the social world, and their significant others don't understand shared time. That pulls on young people so much, they're still searching for their identity, they're searching for personal security and peace of mind, then they're totally torn between their personal life and professional life. That conflict is going to drive coaches away from the profession.

Sylvia Hatchell is another person I look up to in the coaching profession; we started coaching U.S. national teams together in the early eighties and have been good friends since. She's got a husband who's awesome – he's her sounding board, he can be everything for her. I watch that and then I realize what happened to Vivian Stringer who lost her husband. You've got to have someone who's willing to understand and accept that kind of role.

Down the road, my projection for our profession? There's constant talk now of not allowing freshmen to play. Realistically if we don't allow freshmen to play we're into five, if not six years of eligibility. If the frosh don't play, we've got to have freshmen teams and practices, coaches, facilities – we won't double the budget but we'll greatly enlarge it. We had freshmen teams many moons ago before women sports got popular. The men redshirted everybody they had on freshmen teams. That's what they want to go back to, but how many institutions can afford men and women both and really support them properly? If we do that, we'll totally isolate the top schools that have the television dollars.

From my youth, Tiny Vidano (high school physical educator) was my biggest role model. She's a great lady with an energy level that just wouldn't quit. She's the one who taught me to care about kids first and I thought that was really a good lesson. I never had collegiate role models, and until 1978, I really didn't have any coaches I could look up to. Oddly enough, Pat Head Summitt has been a real role model for me and I was coaching when she was still a collegiate athlete! Pat's helped me numerous times in terms of strategy, style, how to deal with kids. Once a few years ago, our team lost, just got blown out by a league opponent with a terrible program. I wrote up my resignation, had it sitting on my desk ready to turn in, when out of the blue, Pat called me. She said, "I saw the score in the paper and thought you might want to talk about it." I'll just never forget that. Pat and Billie Moore (former coach at Cal State Fullerton and UCLA), the two of them I look up to more than anybody in the profession.

Most of my players would tell you they've learned that they can control their own lives, they're not victims of their environment. They can take control of what happens to them. If I can teach kids anything, I hope that's a lesson they walk away with from

Illinois State and our basketball program. You don't have to be a victim of your environment. You learn that through sports, you learn that through teamwork. You decide who you want to be and then you go pursue that. So I hope that's the biggest lesson they learn, with a little self-discipline tossed in.

Life is just one wave after another coming at you and it's how you handle those waves and how you process what happens to you. Life can be positive or life can be negative but you make that decision. Life doesn't. I don't think you can coach and not be optimistic. No matter what happens to you, it can be good or bad. I'm a lifer in this business but that's not a whole lot longer. After thirty years, it's not an endless cycle here! I would like people to think that I gave something to the game, helped it grow and provided opportunities for kids to grow as well.