

Oral History Interview
with
Sandy Fischer

Interview Conducted by
Jerry Gill
May 13, 2010

O-State Stories
Oral History Project

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O-State Stories

An Oral History Project of the OSU Library

Interview History

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Project Detail

The purpose of O-State Stories Oral History Project is to gather and preserve memories revolving around Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (OAMC) and Oklahoma State University (OSU).

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on October 5, 2006.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Sandy Fischer is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 13, 2010.

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About Sandy Fischer...

Sandy Fischer grew up on a farm in Quincy, Illinois, and was never afraid of hard work. Thanks to her older brother who needed someone to practice softball with him, Sandy developed an early interest in the game. Watching him play on the boys' 4-H softball team, she decided girls deserved the same opportunity, so as a nine-year-old she helped organize a girls' 4-H softball team which eventually went on to state tournament championships. The winning trend had begun. After graduating from Quincy High School in 1970, she enrolled at Western Illinois University, taking a softball class as an elective, soon thereafter playing for the university's team. In the four years she played there, the team went to the College World Series three times. After college, Sandy played professionally for the Connecticut Falcons from 1976 to 1979, and the team won the World Series each of those four years. To stay in a sports-related field during the off-season, she started work on a master's degree in intramural administration at Michigan State University. However, due to lack of funds, continuing her education there was a struggle until she was offered an assistantship as a pitching coach. Her two years there as assistant coach began a long career of coaching successes.

After completing her master's degree in 1978, and still playing for the Falcons at the time, Sandy was drawn to Oklahoma State University's small-town charm and landed a teaching and coaching position. Having only coached pitching, she quickly began to hone her coaching skills for the other positions, seeking advice from her Falcon teammates during that last season of professional play. OSU's team had little to no budget or facilities, but they played and traveled as much as fiscally possible to build recognition and reputation. Focused on fundraising, recruiting, and perfecting her coaching abilities, Sandy led the Cowgirls to victory after victory.

As the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women ended and the NCAA took over, her team played in simultaneous championship games under both bodies, in a ten-day timeframe. In Sandy's twenty-three year career at OSU, she coached All-Americans and Olympians, and managed to keep a 90-95 percent graduation success rate among her players. She took her teams to six College World Series and nine conference championships, was Midwest Region Coach of the Year five times, and was named National Coach of the Year in 1989, to list just a few of her many successes and honors. In addition, she is one of the few NCAA coaches who has achieved 900 wins. Sandy (semi-)retired in 2001, coaching for the professional league on occasion, working in recruiting seminars, and inventing products that aid in softball coaching. In 2008, she was inducted into the National Fastpitch Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

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Sandy Fischer



Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Jerry Gill
May 13, 2010
Stillwater, Oklahoma

Gill *My name is Jerry Gill. Today is May 13, 2010. I'm visiting with Sandy Fischer here on the Oklahoma State University campus in Stillwater, Oklahoma. This interview is for the O-STATE Stories Project which is part of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program. Sandy, thank you for taking time to come and visit with us. I appreciate you doing that.*

Fischer Oh, no problem.

Gill *I want to just tick off a few things here, Sandy, and these are just a few of your accomplishments. You're a legend in OSU softball. Twenty-three year coaching career at Oklahoma State University, more than nine hundred wins, nine conference championships, six College World Series appearances, voted Midwest Region Coach of the Year five times, National Coach of the Year in 1989, coached twenty-six All-Americans and in 2008 you were inducted into the National Fastpitch Coaches [Association] Hall of Fame.*

Fischer Yes.

Gill Wow.

Fischer I know.

Gill *Have I left anything out, Sandy?*

Fischer Yes, it's been fun.

Gill *What a ride, but let me stand back a minute, though. First of all, kind of start with the beginning. Can you share a little bit about where you grew up, your family and some of your early life?*

Fischer Sure. I grew up in Quincy, Illinois, on a farm, small farm, and I had an older brother and an older sister, and it was through the experience of my older brother that I got into the sport of softball. We both belonged to 4-H clubs. He was a softball pitcher for the boys' team, and then I helped create at the age of ten a softball team for the 4-H club I belonged to and became the pitcher. So, it was through my association with my brother and playing catch in the backyard that my love of the sport began.

Gill *Now, you grew up on a farm? Is that right?*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *Did your dad also have another job other than farming, or was it pretty much farming?*

Fischer It was a small farm, so he also was a school bus driver. He drove morning and night, and then later on, my mother and father owned a laundromat together and worked that along with the farm. Then later, later in life my mother became a minister.

Gill *Your mother?*

Fischer Yes, at a Unity Church in St. Louis.

Gill *And, again, what church was it you said?*

Fischer Church of Unity, a small church in St. Louis, later down the road after I graduated from college.

Gill *Wow, interesting.*

Fischer Yes, it was very neat.

Gill *You might have given me a clue here, but growing up were there some principles and values that you learned that influenced you and contributed to your success later in life?*

Fischer I think my mother instilled in me more a sense of wonder and possibility about the world because if all things are possible, then you're not narrow minded. You don't put things in a box or a square. You look at the world with a wide open view, and, so, I appreciate that be it a plant blooming or be it just some change in government or the universe or something. I mean, there's always a possibility about something, so it was a very cool thing of philosophy.

Gill *Can you tell me about your other school or community activities there at Quincy? Were you involved in other sports or other organizations?*

Fischer No, unfortunately growing up in my high school situation, we had no sports. It hadn't started yet. A little bit of intramural type of stuff, but I played in the band and, you know, my mother wanted me desperately to play the piano or do dance lessons or whatever. I had no interest. I just wanted to be a farm girl and play with my horse and play softball. That was pretty much what I wanted to do.

Gill *So, what instrument did you play, Sandy?*

Fischer I played the French horn and the flute, of all things. (Laughter) I know. Marching band French horn, yes.

Gill *That's great. Well, kind of going back to your farming experience, it was a working farm, so I guess you got a pretty good dose of work?*

Fischer Very much so, very much a working farm. I got to plow the fields and disc the fields and shock the corn and feed the pigs and do the whole nine yards.

Gill *Got up early in the morning before school and chores after school?*

Fischer Oh, absolutely, yes. Bucket-fed the calves, that whole thing. So, yes, very, very strong appreciation for the land and for the values and the hard work that farmers do to feed us.

Gill *Sandy, getting back to your earlier comment about your older brother, this is sort of a two-part question. Did your parents encourage your participation in softball? Sounded like your brother did, for sure.*

Fischer (Laughs) Well, my brother needed somebody to catch. You know, he wanted to practice. He wasn't really a teaching kind of guy, but he wanted me to help him, so he would pitch to me, and it would hurt, actually. I mean, physically it was hard because he was very strong, so I tried to throw it back as hard as I could, and so that's how I learned to pitch. My father was encouraging. He would come to the games. My mother was more of a background person. She wasn't really sure sports were going to be good for (Laughter) women, but she was like, "If you like to do it, then you need to go do it." And, so, I did.

Gill *So, now, again the genesis of it—your brother played on the 4-H softball team.*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *He pitched. So you decided that the girls should have a team.*

Fischer That's right.

Gill *So, you helped organize that?*

Fischer I did. I joined a different 4-H club. I actually went incognito as a nine-year-old. You weren't really allowed to join until you were ten. So, I lied because I really wanted to start a team. (Laughter) I corralled all my friends and neighbors that I knew that had played in the backyard and different things, and I said, "You've got to join this 4-H Club because we're going to have a softball team."

So, I went to the 4-H leader to ask him, and he said, "Well, no, we don't have enough people. We don't have equipment." And I said, "Well, how about if I get a team? You buy us a couple of bats and some balls and be our coach?" He just kind of laughed. I mean, I was nine years old. He said, "Sure." Well, two weeks later I showed up with ten girls, and away we went, and he was stuck. (Laughter) He didn't know anything about it. You know we got our little t-shirts, and away we went.

Gill *Wasn't it unusual? I can't think of any 4-H clubs—I grew up in a small community and had 4-H that didn't have any sports teams associated with it. Was that unusual?*

Fischer Well, the funny thing about it, I think, because we were in the rural development area is if you got a bunch of kids together and they wanted to play a sport, they found a way for you to do it. Our biggest problem was that there were not age groups. I mean, today you play against an appropriate age group. Then, I mean, at ten years old, I'm playing against eighteen-year-olds, so it could have been extremely dangerous. You had from age ten to eighteen to be in 4-H, and so anything went, so any age went.

Gill *And you didn't wear hard hats in that era?*

Fischer (Laughter) No, no, no, so it was crazy.

Gill *Well, was there any other school or community activities you were involved in? You talked about the band a little bit and, of course, working on the farm you didn't have an opportunity to be involved in a lot of things, but was there any community activity that you were active in?*

Fischer Well, I worked part-time after school when I got to high school. I was in medical records, and I filed records and things after school, so I missed out on a lot of after-school activities. From there, I would go home and help my dad with whatever he needed on the farm, and then it was dark and time to study and do it all over again.

Gill *Start over.*

Fischer So band and orchestra and softball in the summers.

Gill *Well, obviously, Sandy, you were a competitive athlete at an early age.*

Fischer An early age, yes.

Gill *Well, what appealed to you about sports and why do you think you're so competitive? Where did that come from?*

Fischer You know, I think from my mother. I think my mom, in spite of the fact that she later in life became a minister, was extremely competitive. We played a lot of family board games at home in the winter for entertainment and things, and she was a tough one.

Gill *She played to win, huh?*

Fischer Yes, and I wanted to go toe-to-toe, (Laughter) and my brother was competitive. And, so, as a family unit, my sister was not competitive and my dad not so much, but, I mean, we had some go-arounds with Monopoly and all kinds of good things like that, you know. So, I think it came from that.

Gill *How about some highlights of your 4-H softball career. What kind of teams did you have in that?*

Fischer We always finished second in the county, but that qualified us to go to state. We hardly ever had the hitters to do much at state, but I would always get picked up, luckily, as the pitcher to go with the number-one team. You were allowed to pick up several players.

Gill *Oh, okay, I see.*

Fischer So, I became a pick-up, often, to go with them to the state tournaments, and they won it several times, so.

Gill *Your brother, you said you learned from watching him. Did he ever tell you techniques of pitching because there's some...*

Fischer A little bit.

Gill *...fundamentals to pitching that are very important.*

Fischer Yes, he showed me a few things, but he wasn't that well schooled in it either. He was pretty well self-taught, and so basically what I learned from him was my motion. I copied his motion in pitching and different things like that. Actually, you'll find your pitches are—one will be more natural than another based on your body positioning and things. So, I learned some things, and then it was actually after I got out of college that I finally found someone who actually showed me different pitches. (Laughter)

Gill *That long? Mercy.*

Fischer It was that long, but I could hit my spots.

Gill *So, what year did you graduate from...*

Fischer From high school?

Gill *Quincy, is that where you graduated from?*

Fischer Quincy High School, 1970.

Gill *Nineteen seventy? Now, looking at your resume, I know you played at Western Illinois [University].*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *Were women athletes "recruited" at that time?*

Fischer Not yet. I didn't even know they had a softball team until I went to Western. My brother had attended Western. It was an hour from home, so it was a smaller school. I didn't want to go to a big school, and so it fit my profile for going to college.

Gill *So, again, if I understand, you selecting to go to school there didn't have anything to do with the softball necessarily?*

Fischer Yes. As an elective my freshman year, I took a softball class, just an activity class, you know, an hour of credit, something fun to do, and I was messing around with one of my friends before one of the classes started. And the class happened to be taught by the softball coach which I didn't know at the time, and I was pitching on the sidelines, just playing and having fun, and she came over to me and she said "I need to

see you after class.” And I thought I was in trouble (Laughter). The next thing I know, I’m being told about their softball team and she would like for me to try out and different things like that.

So, I actually kind of just fell into it there. Then by the end of my third year of competition, which actually was the end of my fourth year of school, I thought I was finished. I didn’t play as a freshman. I didn’t start playing until I was a sophomore, so I thought at the end of my senior year, I was done. I didn’t know I had four years to compete and had only competed three, so I’m all sad.

I think it’s over, and coach comes up to me and asks me if I’d like to play one more year because I had switched majors and needed an extra semester. I said, “Well, I didn’t think I could.” She said, “Well, yes.” And I said, “Well, I don’t know that my family can really afford more than the last semester.” She said, “What if we give you a talent grant?” and I said, “What’s a talent grant?” She said, “Well, it’s a form of a scholarship for athletics, so we could pay your last semester with a talent grant.” And that was the beginning of athletic scholarships there. So, 1975—’74-’75.

- Gill** *So, the four years you played, then, were? What years did you play?*
- Fischer** *Actually, ’71 to ’75 is when I played.*
- Gill** *Well, some highlights of your playing career, can you tell me a little bit? You all did pretty well, didn’t you?*
- Fischer** *We did. We did. I don’t know what our win-loss record was, but we went to the College World Series three out of my four years.*
- Gill** *With big schools? I mean, how many?*
- Fischer** *Well, the big schools at that time in college softball were in the Midwest: Northern Iowa, Southwest Missouri State, Illinois State and Western Illinois. So the bigger, more competitive, more successful schools, they came out of the Midwest. Then my last year, we started to see Arizona State come in, and a few schools from the West were starting to trickle in. Up until that time, the Midwest had been the real hub for competitive softball.*
- Gill** *Did you pitch in the College World Series games?*
- Fischer** *Yes, three times, yes.*
- Gill** *What kind of record did you have?*

Fischer I don't even remember. I just know we finished in the top four, two out of those three times. We finished fifth once, so we finished third, fourth, and fifth.

Gill *And you won some and lost some?*

Fischer Won some and lost some, but we muddled through. It was double elimination, so it was like forever you played. You actually just ran out of gas more than anything.

Gill *Kind of had to tie your arm on after six. (Laughter)*

Fischer It was brutal.

Gill *Oh gosh. So, some other memories of your student experience at Western Illinois?*

Fischer It was wonderful. Made a lot of friends. We traveled on a dime. It was just one of those things that really brings a lot of people together because you endure so much. And what I can remember was so strange was our softball season couldn't start until women's basketball was over because we wore their uniforms. (Laughter) So, we're out there in these sleeveless little short things, you know, in pretty cold weather, and they really did. They had the one set of uniforms. And basketball didn't start until volleyball was over because they used the uniforms. And, so, it was really kind of interesting how close they cut it financially because there just wasn't a lot to go around.

Gill *I guess you probably didn't travel a long ways to games either, did you?*

Fischer No, but the other flipside of that that was interesting was that we had three teams. We had the varsity, the junior varsity and then we had like a sub-varsity. They were very much into participation but not so much into spending a lot of money to travel very far for competition. So, we just basically traveled around to other schools in the state of Illinois to play, and we all went on the same bus. We put all three teams on a bus and went.

Gill *So, your travel experience is you went on a bus, and what was your lodging like?*

Fischer Oh, Lord. Four or five to a room, whoever was willing to sleep on the floor, you know. Can you get a cot in that room? Is it big enough? I mean, at least four to a room, sometimes five, you know. You'd have to flip for who got the cot and who didn't, you know, different things like

that. There was a lot of hardship, but I don't think we knew any better because we had come out of summer programs or pick-up teams where there was no money anyway. So, to get something paid like your education to play, we didn't care if we slept on the floor. It didn't matter. We were just excited to be on the team.

Gill *Speaking of summer leagues, when you were playing in college, did you ever play any summer softball? Were there summer leagues for college or, I guess, adult league, you'd call it?*

Fischer Yes. We had a travel team in Quincy, Illinois, called the Quincy Jets, and they got put together during my high school years. I was approached to travel with them, and my mother was actually quite adamantly against that. She thought that was a little dangerous, thought maybe I was a little young to go out with what she deemed strangers on the road and do different things. So, after a lot of talking and convincing, she finally let me go, and so I did get to travel, and we went around the state of Illinois and up into Missouri and Kansas and did some different things.

Gill *So, you continued to do that in college, then, and after high school, as well, for summer league?*

Fischer Well, a little bit, not so much. There was a little bit of an age limitation on there, so in the summers I worked. (Laughs)

Gill *Again?*

Fischer Again.

Gill *So after you finished there at Western Illinois, you played for the Connecticut Falcons, is that right? In the Women's Professional Softball League from 1976 to '79?*

Fischer Yes. It was interesting.

Gill *Can you talk about that career?*

Fischer Well, at the end of my senior year, there was rumor that they were going to try and create a women's professional softball league which was just beyond me. I can remember standing on the field during practice going, "If I could only get paid to play this sport, I would just be in heaven." You never, ever thought about coaching, none of that, and a friend of mine said, "Well, why don't you just submit your resume because they're going to do this?" I said, "Honestly, I'm not good enough to play pro. I mean, there are so many good players out there." So, she did it for me, and I didn't know it. So, she submitted my name and wrote out all

the information.

Gill *This was your coach?*

Fischer No, just a friend of mine, one of the athletic trainers who had taken care of me. I had hurt my back one year and she said, “You need to do this.” “I’m not that good,” you know. So, actually, I got a phone call. I had been drafted. I didn’t even know my name was in the pot, so I was really excited, but I had just gotten a full-time job as a program director at a YMCA. My parents worked so hard to put me through college that I just didn’t feel right saying goodbye to a full-time job I just got to go play summer softball, so I said “No. Thank you. I’m excited, but no I can’t.” I thought that was the end of it. A month later, I get another phone call from a legend in our sport, a true legend in our sport: Joan Joyce. She’s the best pitcher...

Gill *What was her name again?*

Fischer Joan Joyce.

Gill *Joyce. Joan Joyce.*

Fischer She’s the best pitcher that’s ever lived. She carries all the records, an absolute phenom, and I had seen her play and her team out of Connecticut. They were called the Raybestos Brakettes, and they won many, many, many, many, many, many national titles in the amateur women’s side of softball. So, she called me one day, and I about fell off my chair. I was like, “Oh, yes. Who is this really?” (Laughter) “Who is this? Who’s kidding around with me? Don’t kid around with me.” She finally convinced me that it was her and that I had been traded since I had turned down the pro team in Chicago.

They traded me to Connecticut. Now, that team I would want to play for because I knew that team was really, really good. They really wanted to play. So, I had this conversation with my mother, of course. Originally, she said, “You know, it’s too risky, and we’ve got too much invested in your college education.” And I agreed. I boohooed, but I agreed. Twenty minutes later she called back, “Oh, go for it. You’re young. You’ll get another job. If that’s what you want to do, go for it.” And so I did.

Gill *How exciting. So, you’ve got this one side, and then she calls back twenty minutes later and totally 180 degrees.*

Fischer Yes, I was so excited I couldn’t hardly stand it. And I didn’t like my job anyway, what I was doing, (Laughs) so I was giddy. So, I moved to Connecticut and ended up playing with them for the four years that that

pro league was in existence, and we won it all four years.

Gill *And that's where you learned to pitch?*

Fischer Well, that's where I learned the mechanics of pitching was from a legend, which was Joan Joyce.

Gill *Wow.*

Fischer I started out just as green and nervous and bad. I was bad the first couple of months until she convinced me I was good. There was this transition in me of confidence and the ability to learn some things and apply them, so it was really a good thing for me.

Gill *Did you play a position as well as pitching when you weren't pitching?*

Fischer Not so much. No. I tried in my younger years to try to play some outfield, etc. I just never was fast enough. I was a pitcher. I hit a little, but I was a pitcher.

Gill *So, you pitched for four years in the league. Do you remember what your record was? Seems like it probably progressed, as you were telling me, and got a little better as you went along.*

Fischer Yes, actually we had four or five pitchers on our team, and we played one hundred to one hundred and twenty game seasons.

Gill *Wow.*

Fischer I had three out of four seasons that were over-twenty-win seasons. I know that, and twenty and four, and twenty and six, but good enough to get us where we were going.

Gill *So, how many teams were in that league?*

Fischer The league started with ten, and then it went to eight because some failed financially, and then it kind of went to six. It was just a hard thing for them to last. And then in the very, very end, the last year, we were actually down to four teams, but our team survived because we were owned by sports greats. Our ownership came from Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova and Sally Little and some other pro golfers.

Gill *Wow.*

Fischer And so pro golf and pro tennis—Joan Joyce had met them on the series—what was that series? *Battle of the Stars* or whatever, superstars series

on TV where they had female athletes competing. So, she met them there and they started talking philosophically why our sport hadn't gone pro, and the pro league was born out of those discussions with other professional athletes.

Gill *What would be a typical attendance for one of your home games?*

Fischer One of our games? We were in Meriden, Connecticut, so it was a midsized community. So, our home games, we'd have a thousand people, fifteen hundred people maybe, and on the best nights probably two thousand, but during the week or week night, that kind of thing, five hundred to eight hundred, probably.

Gill *Do you remember some of the other teams in the leagues?*

Fischer Gosh, we had teams in St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, up in New England, Buffalo, New York, of course in Connecticut. We had San Jose. We had a team up in Edmonton, Canada, down in San Diego, so these teams were all over the United States.

Gill *You did some pretty extensive traveling, then.*

Fischer We did. When we started out, when we had either ten teams or eight teams, we would just travel in our half of the country and kind of contain it and then do one trip to the West Coast and that kind of thing. We traveled a lot by bus and by vans. We flew occasionally.

Gill *Could you live on the salary that you were paid? I mean, do you remember what your salary was?*

Fischer Oh, yes. Sure. (Laughs) I thought I'd hit it. Twenty-three hundred dollars for the summer.

Gill *A summer?*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *Not a month. A summer.*

Fischer No, for the whole summer, but they paid our apartment. We had to pay our own food, but they gave us a place to stay at twenty-three hundred, and I thought I'd hit it. I thought I'd hit the jack pot. (Laughs)

Gill *What did you do in the off-season, then?*

Fischer Well, in the off-season, because I had quit my job, I decided to go to

Michigan State and pursue a master's degree in intramural administration. It was one of the two universities in the country. I wanted to be close to sports, so I thought if I became an intramural director at a university, then I could do some good that way and have some fun and it would be a fun job. So, I went there to get my master's degree in the off-season, and that worked out really well.

Gill *Some kind of small stipend for you there, as you were working on your graduate program?*

Fischer Well, I paid my own way for the first semester, hoping to land a graduate assistantship. I did get one in intramurals, but it wasn't enough. Then at the end of my first semester, I thought, "You know, I'm not sure I can do this financially," because it was out-of-state tuition and all of that. So, I was actually planning on leaving and trying to get back there someday, but I couldn't afford it. So, I have packed. My car is packed. I have given up my apartment.

I'm at the last day of my job at the intramural building, and a softball player walks by. Now, this is four thirty on a Friday before Christmas break. She just waves and says, "I'll see you next semester." And I said, "No, I have to leave. I can't afford to stay, but I'll be back." She said, "Well, we need a coach in softball. We need a pitching coach. Didn't you know that?" I said, "Well, no, I haven't been a part of your team. I don't know that." "Well, Coach is still in her office. Let's go." So, we ran over across campus to the softball coach's office, and this is twenty minutes before the university closes down (Laughter) for Christmas break.

Gill *And the coach is still there. Amazing.*

Fischer She's still there. Amazing. Amazing. And I said, "Do you have an opening, because I really need a graduate assistantship to stay?" She goes, "Oh my God, yes. I need a pitching coach. She just quit!" So, long story short, that's how I got into coaching, and I was hooked. And I was hooked.

Gill *I know you're trying to kind of get to the season, so, the spring when you're a coach with Michigan State.*

Fischer Michigan State. Yes, assistant coach at Michigan State.

Gill *When did your pro season begin? Did it overlap with the spring season?*

Fischer Very little, very little. So, we were done there middle of May. The pro season we had to report by the third week of May to get going. Our

season started the first of June.

Gill *So, dove-tailed pretty nicely, then.*

Fischer Yes. It fit pretty well.

Gill *So, did you do that two years, then, as a graduate assistant coach?*

Fischer Yes. Assistant coach at Michigan State for two years. And then I went to try to find a job. I mean, after I graduated, it was like, "Now what?" It was all cool and dandy, (Laughter) but now what? So, I went to a convention where physical educators were and started just filling out applications and putting them in the slots at this convention. I noticed Oklahoma State had a job opening for teaching and becoming a softball coach.

Gill *This was in '78?*

Fischer Yes. So, I stuck it in the slot, and then I saw the University of San Francisco had one for softball and a volleyball assistant, so I stuck it in the slot. I didn't know anything about volleyball, but I stuck it in the slot. So, I did that five or six times, and I would come back and check to see if anyone wanted an interview, and I really, really was interested in Oklahoma State. Small town, that kind of thing.

Gill *So, this is at a conference, now, and so they had these little boxes so coaches, then, from those schools, or administrators were coming...*

Fischer Administrators.

Gill *...and checking their boxes periodically.*

Fischer Yes, and they could interview people right there. They had little interview rooms.

Gill *Do you remember who the OSU person was you talked to?*

Fischer Susan Hall. Now, what happened was I never got an interview with her. She never responded. All my stuff was still in the slot. I put a new one in every day. I got the call from University of San Francisco, and they wanted to hire me on the spot. They just thought it was cool I'd played the pro thing and all of that. I did not want to live in downtown San Francisco. I was a farm girl, but I was like, "Well, this is the only job being offered because Oklahoma State has not responded." So, I left there with a job, but I was devastated until I'm in the lobby. I'm packed. I'm leaving and a friend of mine comes...

Gill *This sounds familiar now. This is twenty minutes before school is out and the other job, and now you were leaving. (Laughs)*

Fischer I swear on my mother's bible, this is true. A friend of mine grabbed me and she said, "I found the woman from Oklahoma State. She's over there checking out." And I was like, "What?" She said, "Come on." So, she's dragging me over and introducing us, and she's like, "Oh, I'm so sorry I never got back with you. I meant to call you, and I was going to call you when I got back because your resume looks very interesting to us." She had been spending most of her time partying, and so she was just going to take the information home and make the phone calls from here. (Laughter)

Gill *Knowing Susan...*

Fischer Yes. After I got to know Susan, I totally understood it all. (Laughter) So, she had been in the bars having some fun at convention, (Laughter) and I'm just dying to get an interview. So, anyway, she did call afterwards and did fly me in for the interview, and the rest is history. (Laughs) I had to take a cut in pay from San Francisco, though.

Gill *So, you went back home, I guess, or to wherever, to Michigan State.*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *Then how long between the time you met Susan there at the conference until you came back for the interview?*

Fischer Oh, probably a week or two.

Gill *So, this would have been in the spring, summer of '78?*

Fischer This was summer of '78. I came in for my interview, and the job was for part-time teaching and part-time coaching. So, I had to interview with Dr. Oberle.

Gill *So, your professional season was over at that time?*

Fischer Well, I took some time off.

Gill *Took some time off?*

Fischer You know, they would let you do that.

Gill *Oh, okay.*

Fischer I come in for several days, and I interview with Dr. Oberle.

Gill *George Oberle, head of the Health and Physical Education Leisure [Studies] Department (HPELS)?*

Fischer Yes, and that part was very nerve wracking for me because I had no teaching experience. I mean, I only had coaching experience. I thought he pretty well held the key to it, which I think he did in the long run, but I think he felt comfortable enough after the interview that it was going to be okay. Then I spent my time interviewing on the athletic side and meeting the folks then.

Gill *Do you remember some of the people you interviewed with?*

Fischer Golly. It was mostly Susan. It was mostly Susan, but Polly McCormick was there. She was one of Susan's secretaries, and, gosh, I can't even remember. I'm having a blank. It was so long ago.

Gill *Was Dick Young there as athletic director at that time?*

Fischer There was someone maybe before him, or maybe Dick was there.

Gill *But was anyone involved from the athletics department side, or is this all for HPELS side, your interviews?*

Fischer Mostly HPELS. Mostly, because I don't think the coaching part was that important to them at the time. I think the teaching was much more important, and I think athletics were just starting to gain some credibility for women on that side. But it was interesting. We had no softball field at the time I was hired. We had an open field. We had no softball field.

Gill *Let me move back and ask you. What do you remember about the structure? We were talking around the edge of it a little bit, but when you got there in '78, what was the organizational structure for women's intercollegiate athletics?*

Fischer It had already been planned to split, you know, between athletics and the HPELS. They were already planned to split, so I arrived during, kind of, the transitional year. My first office was over in the Colvin Center with PE. I taught over there. Everything I had was over there, and then the following year I got an office over in Gallagher Iba Arena and we made the split. The offices were moved, etc. It was really in that transitional time that athletics became its own entity.

Gill *But your first year there, was it still under HPELS, that '78- '79 season?*

Fischer Yes, they were transitioning at that time.

Gill *What appealed to you about the position, because certainly we barely had a softball program, as I recall, sort of a name only, played maybe a few teams around the state. So, what appealed to you about the position?*

Fischer What appealed to me was the community, was the fact that this was in Oklahoma, not that far from Illinois. It was rural, but it was a big-time school, and I was comfortable in this community, and the people I met while I was here were very warm and welcoming and very, very helpful. So, I really enjoyed the people. That was a big part of it, and then the challenge of developing a softball program that they were kind of at a point of, “We’re going to keep it or not keep it. We’re not very successful. We’re not happy with where we are.” It was very challenging for me. I like challenges, but on the other hand, I’m scared to death. I had no clue if I had the know-how. I was a pitcher, you know. I had to learn how to teach all of the other positions.

Gill *When you were at Michigan State, you were just a pitching coach, and that’s what you knew.*

Fischer That’s right. That’s what I knew, and pitching is what I did. So, I had to learn footwork on a double play, and I had to learn hitting techniques, and I had to learn all of that. And I learned all of that by playing in the pro league and picking minds and brains and asking lots of questions from other people on the team that were already high school coaches or whatever. Then I would keep books and just, I would learn. I felt like a sponge.

Gill *Sandy, kind of expanding on that, you actually played one more season. You played in ’79 with Connecticut in the professional league?*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *So, OSU’s season was over your first year. Then you played one more year of professional ball, so that’s what you’re saying. You took advantage of the extra year to learn from the professionals.*

Fischer Yes. And, see, we were only on ten-month contracts here, so we weren’t even paid in the summer. So, I had to work in the summer, and when the pro league ended, I was like, “What am I going to do for two months?” So, I ran a fireworks stand for several years (Laughter) in the off-season. I begged to be on a twelve-month contract, but I didn’t get one for three or four years.

Gill *Well, now, you said you took a cut in salary when you left? (Laughter) Was it the professional team, you made twenty-three hundred a summer?*

Fischer No, I took a cut in salary by not taking the job in San Francisco.

Gill *Oh, San Francisco, that's right.*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *So, do you recall what your starting salary was?*

Fischer Oh.

Gill *Do you mind sharing that?*

Fischer Yes. When I was a program director at the YMCA, that was nine thousand a year. Nine. And then when I got the offer from San Francisco, it was fourteen. I was just like, "Wow! That's great."

Gill *What are you going to do with all this money?*

Fischer What am I going to do with all that? When Oklahoma State came along, they offered me ten, and master's [degree] required. Ten thousand dollars a year, ten-month contract. I was like, "Oh." (Laughter) So, we negotiated and got it up to eleven.

Gill *Oh, tough negotiator.*

Fischer (Laughs) So, I started out at eleven thousand dollars, master's required. Then after I signed my contract, I was just doing some research, and I had to deal with Gary Ward with baseball for practice facilities in the winter and stuff. I said, "So, where'd you get your master's?" "I don't have a master's." "They don't require you to have a master's and you make all that much more money than I do? This is a problem." So, I got my feathers ruffled pretty early (Laughter) by what I was required to have versus the baseball coach.

Gill *Well, kind of getting back to the position condition of the softball program when you got there. First of all, they had a program, but they were playing a very limited schedule, playing pretty much teams around the state, some adjoining maybe, but a limited schedule.*

Fischer Right.

Gill

And, again, tell me about the facilities, now, where you played.

Fischer

Well, when I got here I asked Susan to drive me past the softball field, so she drives me past the corner of Duck and McElroy, and it's just a field. I mean, just dirt, grass, there's no structure, and she said, "That is where your softball field will be." I said, "What do you mean 'will be'?" And she goes, "Well, we don't really have one yet, but we feel that we will in a year. At least we'll have a skinned-in field and a backstop for you in a year." I was like, "What?" She goes, "Well, we couldn't skin it because we also had women's field hockey playing there." I said, "So, where does softball play?" and she said, "Well, it's at a city park."

So, we played at a city park. We didn't schedule any home games, really, the first year. We went on the road, and so that's how that facility started. The original softball field was forty thousand dollars which was huge money at the time which gave us two dugouts, if you want to call them that, and a backstop, and that was pretty much it. We had one set of temporary bleachers that we would move in from other sports.

Gill

Was that in the same location where the current stadium is now?

Fischer

Yes.

Gill

Well, Sandy, I want to get back to when you arrived. It was really a transitional period for women's intercollegiate athletics. As you indicated, it had been in the department of physical education, HPELS, Health Physical Education Leisure [Studies].

Fischer

Yes, it's a mouthful.

Gill

Yes, but anyway, at this point we were transitioning under the umbrella of the athletics department. Also, women's intercollegiate athletics, the governing body, had been the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, AIAW was transitioning into NCAA. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions along those lines if you don't mind, get your thoughts.

Fischer

No, that's fine.

Gill

What was the administrative status in women's sports relative to the athletic department? You were under HPELS, and then you had an athletic director for women and that was Susan Hall.

Fischer

Yes.

Gill

So, the coach reported to Susan. Okay. The transition was in '78-'79, '79-'80. What was the feeling? How did coaches and supporters of

women's sports feel at that time about transitioning from HPELS to intercollegiate athletics department?

Fischer

I was so young and didn't know the other coaches that had been here, already established, really didn't understand their feelings or know them. I was just trying to learn my sport and figure out how I was going to coach this group of kids.

Gill

And where your fields were going to be.

Fischer

Where my field was going to be and all of that. So, what I remember is that, you know, the AIAW was a very strong organization for women's athletics. Then we had the men over here, the NCAA, and that there was animosity about the NCAA. You started hearing all of the rumors, how the NCAA wanted to take over the AIAW and bring all the women under NCAA. The AIAW people were very, very progressive and were doing a very good job with their association for women. In fact, we had fifteen scholarships under AIAW, and then as we're getting closer to getting absorbed by the NCAA, the rumor is we're going to go in our sport from fifteen to eleven.

To me, it's a total slide backwards and so being absorbed by the NCAA, I didn't see as a positive at all. I didn't see it as a positive at all. The AIAW, the women involved in coaching at that time, were very anti-NCAA. A lot of them were, not all, but a lot of them were because the NCAA kept throwing you the bones, you know, "We can pay for your travel to the championships, we can do this and we can do that." But to a lot of us, it was a slide backwards at the time.

Gill

Kind of breaking it down to two parts, locally Oklahoma State University was moving from HPELS to the department of intercollegiate athletics. Dick Young was hired as athletic director, I believe, in August of '78, about the same time you were getting there. Many people felt that one of the reasons Dick was hired was because of his experience having been at Bowling Green University, his previous job, merging the men and women's program under the umbrella of the athletics department. In your opinion, how supportive was he of women's sports, and was he effective in managing that merger, do you think?

Fischer

Well, you're talking to someone who was quite young. (Laughter) At that point in time, I thought equality should abound. I did. I felt like my program should have equal access to a lot of things. I think Dick Young probably, overall, did a better job than what I remember. I only dealt with him with my sport, and I thought we could've, would've, should've had more.

For example, I needed an assistant coach right away, and I wanted a small stipend, a graduate assistantship, something, to hire an assistant coach. He said, “Well, Sandy,” and I’ll never forget this. (Laughs) “I guarantee you that there is a volunteer in this community, a housewife or someone who would give you that expertise, and assistance, for free.” (Laughter) Okay, well let me just tell you how that set in my soul. I mean, really, seriously. I’m looking at baseball, who doesn’t need a master’s. He’s got two assistant coaches, you know, and you’re telling me to go get a housewife? You know, so (Laughter) we probably got off on the wrong foot. On the other hand, he did say, “If you are successful, then at some point in time very soon we will be able to substantiate your needs, get you a full time assistant coach,” etc., etc. So, it took time.

Gill

How long did it take to get that assistant? Two years?

Fischer

(Laughs) Several. Several.

Gill

Then you brought in—is that when Margaret Rebenar—you had played with her in the professional league? Is that right?

Fischer

Yes, and Margaret and I had been teammates, and she came for three thousand dollars.

Gill

Wow. (Laughs)

Fischer

And was a part-time assistant. Then we finally got her bumped, after three or four years, up to nine thousand dollars, three-quarter time, so she could get benefits. So, in all actuality, it probably took five years, six years, to get a full-time assistant.

Gill

Were there some noticeable changes in the sports program immediately after the merger that you could, on a positive note, refer to?

Fischer

Well, I didn’t know the program before because I was in the transitional year, so my point of reference would be different than another coach that actually was here several years before the transition started. All I know is we didn’t have a big budget. We didn’t travel far, and I knew that if we were going to be any good, we were going to have to get out and compete, and I didn’t know how we were going to do it. We may not eat well, but we were going to have to travel. Drive the vans and get to some competition because you can’t get better unless you compete, so that was my main focus.

Gill

In your opinion, were the women’s programs stronger after the merger? Now, I’m not talking about twenty years down the road, but even, say, three, four, five years later. Were they stronger after the merger, do you

think, than they were before?

Fischer

After the merger of the men and women's athletic departments?

Gill

The men and women's athletic departments together.

Fischer

I think probably they were, in a way, because we were now merging resources and we were now getting different sets of expectations about winning. You can't win unless you are supported in some way, financially, scholarships, travel, that kind of thing. So, there was some more of that that came along, probably, but the AIAW was an extremely competitive association. I always saw them as very, very progressive.

I always kind of saw the NCAA as the enemy of women because we're doing really well over here. I think the NCAA feared the AIAW was going to grow into an entity that would challenge them or be bigger than them in some fashion, and they wanted us all under the same umbrella.

Gill

I want to come back to that, but I want to ask you a follow-up question about the merger. After it took place, was there more interest in the enforcement of Title IX? Do you feel like the merger would bring the two together, fold them together, whatever you want to call it (I'll say merger; I'll use that word) but bring in the women's intercollegiate athletic programs under the umbrella with the athletics department with the men's sports? What do you think the impetus for that was? Was that more Title IX, or was there other issues involved in that decision? I mean, what was the force behind that merger?

Fischer

I think the force was separating athletics from the educational side, the teaching, and that kind of thing. This is an entity over here. We have our sports teams, and we're going to have a department that services our sports teams, the educational side, the academics, the health side, the athletic trainers, that kind of thing. We're going to have an entity here. We're going to have to raise money through football and basketball, so our focus became athletics because we were athletic teams separated from the educational side of teaching.

Gill

George Oberle and HPELS and some of the other administrators, you think they viewed that as a positive thing...

Fischer

I do.

Gill

... to spin off, if you will, the intercollegiate sports?

Fischer

Yes, because they could both now focus on really what their priority was instead of trying to merge the two. I don't know if there are any

departments left that were merged. University of Arkansas was merged until recently, still, and I don't know at what point they finally separated. It took some schools a very long time to separate. So, I think it was a progressive move to separate, and at the time we remained AIAW in NCAA. We still got to function in our own little worlds and entities before the merger completely to NCAA.

Gill

Kind of back to the Title IX question, thinking about Title IX on a larger scale than just OSU, nationally, what would you say has been its legacy, and has it fulfilled its expectations for its original proponents?

Fischer

I think Title IX is still a work in progress. I think that, for us, until we challenge some things by using the law of Title IX, athletic directors were still wanting to give you as little as possible to be successful because it was an investment, and we didn't have a lot of money in a lot of situations. So, as you went down the pecking order, women's basketball was always held in high esteem. Athletic directors always took women's basketball, and it was the example, so they got the money. They got the full scholarships. They got the higher salaries, and then the rest of us kind of split this little pot (Laughs) over here. And I don't know why it was that way, but it was that way.

When Title IX came along, it wasn't just immediate that we started. And then Title IX got challenged in the courts, so it gave athletic departments the ability to not really keep investing vigorously because they didn't know if the law was going to be overturned. So, there was this lull. And the early '80s was like, "Hmm, is it really going to happen?" and, "Do we really have to go by these standards?" There was a lot of foot dragging during that time until it was challenged and upheld, so that became a turning point for us.

Gill

And, of course, obviously a lot of progress has been made the last few years. Is there still work to be done, in your opinion?

Fischer

I think there is, but I think Oklahoma State is doing well. I think on a national scale, there is lots of work to be done, particularly in the smaller schools, high schools, that kind of thing. I don't think there is equity at all in a lot of those situations. We had recruited a young lady out of Alabama, and her father had done some Title IX work. He was a lawyer. And so when she came onto the team, he was in my ear like this, you know. (Laughter) He was like, "Facilities, locker room, equal time in the weight room, the time of day you have to practice in the winter versus baseball, salaries..." I mean, it just went on and on and on, and he's like, "Sandy." (Laughs)

Gill

Sandy, perspective to asking how, you know, the women's coaches felt

about going in. How did the men, the coaches in the men's sports and supporters of the men's programs, how did they feel about merging women's sports programs?

Fischer

I doubt very well. I doubt they liked it because, really, there's a boys' club, and there's a way of doing in men's athletics. Women were feeling very good and independent over here with the AIAW, and they felt like they got swallowed up by the old boys' club. So, there was a little bit of angst, anyway, when the NCAA took us over in 1982. It was transitional for a couple of years, and there was some angst.

Gill

Did the women's sports have a choice in moving to the NCAA?

Fischer

No.

Gill

It was kind of a shotgun wedding in their choice in going into the NCAA. Who was pushing that? Was it here locally, or was that national?

Fischer

That was national. That was national. And the AIAW did sue the NCAA because the NCAA started setting up rules and that they were forcing athletic directors into deciding, "Do we keep our women under AIAW, or do we take the carrot that the NCAA is giving us and put our women's sports in the NCAA?" So, they were offering some incentives for the athletic directors to bring their women's sports out of one association into the other. The AIAW was suing the NCAA for infringement or for that luring away. The women's sports didn't want to be lured away, but the athletic directors were forcing us from this association to that association.

Gill

Did all of the teams make the transition at the same time?

Fischer

Yes.

Gill

So, it was collectively across the board and nationally?

Fischer

Yes.

Gill

In 1982?

Fischer

Well, it wasn't across the board nationally. The transition happened, but the NCAA said, "You have to make a decision. You're coming with us, and it starts in 1982, okay? Or you're not, and you stay with AIAW." Well, there were so few left that decided to stay with AIAW that the association collapsed. It could no longer fund itself. This administration at Oklahoma State decided we were going to NCAA, so we had a transition year which was 1982 in championships and everything else.

We were one of two teams, I think, only, that qualified for both national championships.

Gill

In '82?

Fischer

Yes.

Gill

So, you played in both tournaments?

Fischer

Yes. They were back-to-back, and we were in the national championship against Texas A&M and the AIAW national championship.

Gill

The finals?

Fischer

Yes. In fact, [we were leading] going into the seventh inning with two outs and lost. (Laughs) Painful. Come home, wash our uniforms and get on the bus and go to Omaha for the very first NCAA women's College World Series.

Gill

So, you played in the last AIAW and then the championship game and then the first women's College World Series.

Fischer

Yes. In a ten-day span.

Gill

Wow. That would be kind of an exciting time.

Fischer

It was wild.

Gill

I can imagine.

Fischer

Yes, it was wild. So, interesting.

Gill

Were you active in AIAW, any of the committees?

Fischer

I was on a selection committee, one of the selection committees, to help decipher who qualified for the championships and that kind of thing. I was a representative for our Midwest region for that.

Gill

So, if you had a chance to know both organizations, were there some philosophical differences in principles of the two organizations, and, if so, could you kind of describe those?

Fischer

Well, I think that the AIAW, being driven by very strong progressive women at that period in time and the Title IX, and feeling very bold because of the law, etc., I think the thinking and the overall aspect of the AIAW was much more progressive for women. When we went to the

NCAA, then we felt like we took a step back because we had fewer scholarships. And, yes, higher money was given to us, better money for travel and that kind of thing, but we lost our athletes. So, we had to tell four athletes, "See you later, because we don't have a scholarship for you next year." So, we had to make some very painful decisions in that transition for our kids. We felt like we kind of went back a step, but it's come a long way. I think the NCAA has become very progressive.

Gill

Was there differences? For example, did the AIAW put a little more emphasis on scholarship principles as opposed to just winning and money? What were the perceived differences, philosophically, between the two organizations?

Fischer

Well, we were trying at that time as an association, just like the NCAA had gone so far forward with the men's sports. The AIAW was trying to do the exact same thing for women's sports: TV, you know, very progressive championships and large numbers of scholarships to give more kids opportunity to play. So, we were trying to do very progressive things and bringing up the rear. We're having to do them later than the NCAA. They've been in existence forever, and the men's sports were already pretty much out there, the big ones, and getting all of the press. So, we were trying to come along and expose women nationally by television and by championships and sponsorships and things like that.

Gill

So, scholarships was one impact on changing under the umbrella of the NCAA. Was there any other immediate effects, benefits, good, bad, from the merger that you recall?

Fischer

I think the number one worst impact was the scholarship. All of a sudden, we felt like our hands were really tied on getting good exceptional numbers of quality athletes on a team, so that part was very painful from a coaching standpoint. However, we did see a budget increase, not dramatic. I would say ten percent, maybe twenty in some cases, for our travel.

I can remember sitting at a coaches meeting, and we were talking about Title IX, and we had all of the head coaches. I remember football was there, basketball, I mean, all of the male and female coaches, and we were supposed to give somewhat of a little report on our team and how this transition was helping us or not. I can remember giving a report on my team, and I was trying to explain to them how we travel. We travel by broken-down vans, you know, they just kept them running. It didn't matter how we got there. We got there. We came home in more than one vehicle that we shouldn't have ever even been in, but, you know, the budget was the budget.

I can remember one segment where I was explaining to all of the coaches, and really in a dramatic fashion because it was dramatic for us, that when we went out on the road and traveled that we had one dollar for breakfast to feed our team per kid, and we had a dollar fifty for lunch and two dollars for dinner. That was our *per diem* that we spent on these kids, so we often times went without breakfast so that we would have enough to feed them for lunch and for dinner. I can remember Pat Jones, football [coach], just looking at me going, “You’re not serious.” I said “I’m totally serious. Here’s our budget. We cut it among these many kids per trip. That’s what it comes out, and that is our reality.” And he could not believe it. He looked directly at the athletic director and said, “That’s criminal.” He said, “That’s not right.”

I think there were just so many people that were ignorant of what the women were used to, what they were enduring, and until we actually got some serious relief I had gone in year after year after year with budgets and said, “We need this, this and this.” “But your travel budget is the same as tennis.” And I said, “So, take five or eight kids and divide it into that number for travel, and then take twenty people that we travel with, with the players and the coaches, and divide it into the same number and see what you get.” And it was at that point that there was a dawning of the age that really our budget should be bigger because we had more people. So, it’s just very simplistic things that needed to be better thought out, I think, over the years, and they were. Things did get gradually better.

Gill

Sandy, moving back to the discussion about the Cowgirl softball team, (Laughter) could we kind of focus on the early years? I’m thinking ’78, ’79, ’80, ’81, ’82, you know, the first five years or so, those first transitional, struggling kind of years. Do you remember what your program budget, your total budget, was at that time?

Fischer

Oh jeez. I’m thinking my first budget for everything, fifteen, twenty thousand dollars. Twenty-five, maybe? No, I think it was thirty-five with salaries.

Gill

With salaries? That would have been for yours, and still some left. (Laughter)

Fischer

And my housewife assistant. (Laughter)

Gill

But that was free, remember? (Laughter)

Fischer

That’s right, but yes it was very low. Of course, when I got here, I inherited uniforms, so we already had that expense taken care of.

Gill

Fischer *What was it? The basketball uniforms? (Laughter)*

Gill It wasn't, no. No, we had the astro-orange striped uniforms.

Fischer *Did you wear the pants...*

Gill Yes, we did.

Fischer *...as opposed to the shorts? Was that your preference?*

Gill No, that wasn't my preference, and at the time, that wasn't the girls' preference either. Although, it is the girls' preference today to wear pants because they're more aggressive sliders and that kind of thing.

Fischer *That's what I always thought about when I'd look at their shorts when they'd slide. I'd think, "Oh my gosh."*

Gill Oh yes, painful, painful, but we had the knickers. Yes, it was interesting.

Fischer *When you first came, not when you got into the NCAA, but how many did you have? You had fourteen scholarships?*

Gill Fifteen.

Fischer *I mean fifteen, pardon me.*

Gill Yes, for the AIAW.

Fischer *Paid scholarships? Was the university paying for those? It was in your budget?*

Gill Yes, yes.

Fischer *So, after you paid for your scholarships, you paid for your salary, which is why you were down to a dollar for breakfast.*

Gill Yes, we had great kids, but we couldn't go anywhere, you know? We were actually quite, quite fortunate. Actually, when I very, very first got here we only had the funding for twelve, and by my second or third year, they had upped the funding to fifteen. So, we were fully funded, but it took a couple of years after I got here to get that, and yes. Actually, the state of Oklahoma had some very good softball, and the very first thing I did was rob OU's number one pitching recruit, and it caused quite a stir, you know. I didn't rob her. I just talked to her after she had already committed to OU. I was brand new on the block. I didn't know anything.

And who was that?

Fischer

Nancy Teehee. She was a very good pitcher. So, we got her to come on campus and talk, and she had heard that I had played in the pros and was a pitcher, and that was all exciting to her. So, we got her all committed, and then she hurt her knee playing basketball in high school her senior year. She still came and was a very good pitcher for us, but that knee injury really took it out of her. It changed her a little bit, but the OU people, Marita Hynes, I mean—mad. (Laughs)

Gill

There's already bad blood there, and that just really cemented it, didn't it? (Laughter)

Fischer

Yes, but we had very good athletes here, actually. Very good.

Gill

You had mentioned earlier, in terms of the scholarships, how did that compare with, say, compared to baseball, maybe your counterpart, in terms of scholarships?

Fischer

We have always had more than baseball because baseball has always been NCAA. So, they were at around a nine-point- or a ten-point-something scholarships when we were at eleven. When we came in at the eleven-scholarship mark, we still had more than baseball which was interesting because they couldn't cut us below eleven because they had already taken us down from fifteen to eleven, and we couldn't go below baseball. I mean, it was like two blows if we went below baseball, so they always kept us just a couple of tenths above.

Gill

Was softball an equivalency sport? You could partial it out so you could have more than eleven people getting aid, but you could only total eleven full scholarships for tuition.

Fischer

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely, yes. And for a while we can only have so many in-state, so many out-of-state, and then you pool that money and you could split it accordingly. So, you've got the money of x number in-state, x number out-of-state, we eventually transitioned over to the money of all out-of-state. So, we had a bigger pool of money to work with for athletes.

Gill

So, we were talking about facilities earlier, and I want to go back and revisit. (Laughter) Your first year, you didn't play any home games, '78, '79. No home games...

Fischer

No.

Gill

...because you didn't have a place, or you were too embarrassed?

Fischer

Right, and our recreational facility was really poor. It really wasn't well kept, and our maintenance people really weren't allowed to take care of it. It was a slow-pitch dimension, and it was just a hardship for us to entertain games at home, so we went on the road.

Gill

How did you do practice then?

Fischer

Well, we practiced at the facility over on Airport Road, those fields out there. Yes, we got to practice out there.

Gill

Across from the golf course?

Fischer

Yes.

Gill

That had to be tough to overcome.

Fischer

Yes, it was interesting, but when we did get our own field, we thought we had died and gone to heaven because we could go right there on campus every day to our own field.

Gill

Well, let's talk about that. That had to be a huge benefit for your program. That was done in a couple of phases. Can you kind of share how the softball stadium project had evolved?

Fischer

Right. Our softball field, like I said, started off very bare bones. We had the skinned field, and we had no permanent fence in the outfield because they still wanted to play some field hockey on our field. So, we had a temporary fence. We had a backstop. We had temporary bleachers. That was it. They would bring in a port-a-potty for the season, but other than that, we didn't have any facilities. We kept adding things like a press box and a concession stand, and we finally got a permanent bathroom added.

Then they decided at one point that it was time to actually have a stadium because all over the country, schools had softball fields, and then Fresno State and the University of Arizona both built stadiums. The verbiage had never been used in our sport. Always in baseball, baseball stadiums, and now we're saying softball stadiums, and it was foreign language because we never, ever had anything that was a stadium.

Then the Amateur Softball Association located in Oklahoma City built a stadium where the College World Series is played now on a yearly basis. Once these were starting to crop up, it then became the big deal because of Title IX, etc., to start building softball stadiums around the country to equate to the baseball stadiums, the equity of baseball-softball.

Gill

Facilities war, here.

Fischer

The facilities war, Title IX for sure.

Gill

So, how did you get the funding for your stadium?

Fischer

Well, that was up to the athletic director. I didn't have to fundraise it, etc. That was his job, and I know to facilitate some of it, he actually had a football game played up in Kansas City between us and Nebraska, and I know the funds from that game helped finish our project. You'd look at it, the money goes up to what it costs to build it. Started out at a \$1.1 million project, ended up a \$2.1 million project which today isn't much, but he had to find that extra money. He was progressive enough to use some funds from the football game.

Gill

In those first few years, can you talk about how your schedule changed? You were talking about how when you first came you were playing just—did you play in the fall at all at that time?

Fischer

Well, we were allowed to play in the fall. We were allowed to play x number of games and you could have a certain number in the fall that actually counted toward your win-loss getting into the World Series under the AIAW, okay? So, we did play about a twelve-game, fifteen-game fall and then played the rest in the spring.

Gill

Your first spring season, how many games did you play. Do you recall?

Fischer

Twenty, twenty-five, maybe.

Gill

What do they play, forty or fifty now?

Fischer

Oh, yes. Fifty-some.

Gill

And so when you started expanding your schedule, then, say, your second or third year, did you increase the number you were playing?

Fischer

Yes. We increased the number of tournaments we played in because there was a formula where one day of the tournament, no matter how many games you played, only counted as one game. So, there were some formulas in place that would allow you to play more games than you were actually really allowed. So, we went on a tournament tear. We started hosting tournaments.

We would drive to New Mexico to Texas to Illinois. I mean, we drove anywhere we physically could get in a day and go to tournaments and

play as many games as we could and then drive home. And, wow. We traveled forever, and the coaches drove the vans and the kids slept. It was dangerous, but we did that because we wanted to compete and get better and get national exposure, and it helped us in recruiting when people would see us play.

Then all of a sudden, jeez, I don't know, six, seven, eight years into my coaching, we finally decided we needed to do a trip by air. We needed to fly, and our first trip we flew in to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and it was snowing. (Laughter) So, I'm thinking as we're landing, "All this money, we finally get to fly, and it's freaking snowing." But it stopped and we played.

Gill

At least you had the long pants, anyway.

Fischer

Yes, we had the long pants. That's right.

Gill

We were talking about when you traveled, lodging, you were explaining four or five to a room in the early days. Did that start getting a little bit better for you? What kind of places were you staying?

Fischer

It did start to get better. We still had four to a room, but we were staying in better motels. You know, the roach motels were behind us now, (Laughter) and we were moving up a little bit. We left more than one motel in my lifetime because of insects. (Laughter)

Gill

Are you serious? It was so bad, you got up and left? (Laughter)

Fischer

(Laughs) Yes. Oh, Lord, somewhere between here and Iowa.

Gill

You're trying to forget it, right?

Fischer

Trying to forget it, yes. But then we went three to a room, and then we eventually got to a point where it was mandated by the administration that we go two a room. There had been enough lawsuit things going on around the country that we got to the point where we didn't drive vans anymore. We went by bus because of safety and two to a room for equity.

Gill

Wow.

Fischer

Yes, it was like, "Whew."

Gill

The clouds had to roll away, and the sun came out. (Laughter)

Fischer

(Laughs) We were like, "Wow, this is how they've been doing it forever.

This is cool.”

Gill

Well, along the same lines, how extensive were women’s sports covered? Again, in those early years, right at that transition, late ’70s, early ’80s—and was OSU’s, for example, media coverage in Stillwater, Oklahoma City, Tulsa? What kind of coverage did softball get? (Laughter) You’re laughing. I think I got the answer.

Fischer

I think I was not well liked in the Sports Information department because of my insistence that we get some reporting. It became a sore point because what was happening was, it would go into the newspaper that people would read at five o’clock that day that we played at two o’clock. (Laughter) We were expected to have crowds. We were expected to try to get people to come to our games. My contention was there was never anything in the paper saying that, “We’re going to play tomorrow night. Please come out and watch us play,” or a schedule of any sort, public, other than the little schedule cards that had been handed out in the community. So, we had some go-arounds about that. It was too little too late. Let’s make it worthwhile. Give us some coverage and then at the end of the article say when we play again.

Gill

Hopefully a day in advance.

Fischer

Hopefully a day in advance. I went to the *Stillwater NewsPress* and I asked them to actually print, which they’re doing now which is awesome, but years ago, just print a schedule of what’s coming up this weekend, you know, softball, two o’clock, baseball, two o’clock, so that people have the opportunity. They do that now, and it’s quite helpful. I know, I read it all the time. I just think we needed more.

Gill

Well, after your conversations, did they assign someone on the Sports Information director’s staff to cover?

Fischer

We always had a student. A student was assigned to us to cover, and a lot of them did a good job. Sometimes they traveled with us, and they did as much as they were allowed to do. I had no issue with the students. They took some interviews and things. The coaches, we were supposed to report back to Sports Information after the games to let them know who won, who lost, have a comment, that kind of thing, and then if there was room in the paper, they would get us in.

Gill

Did you ever have to do any sort of writing of any of the material yourself?

Fischer

Oh no. Never did that. Never did that. They wouldn’t let us do that. We all got along in the end, but I was a little bit of a bull in a china shop

early on. (Laughs)

Gill

That leads me into my next part. Do you feel that when you started earlier that you had adequate resources to be successful?

Fischer

Oh boy.

Gill

Define “adequate resources,” right?

Fischer

Yes, define “adequate resources.” I think at that moment I didn’t really know what other schools had. I didn’t really know what we didn’t have, and so I was focused on coaching our kids and trying to be winners whether we played twenty games or we played fifty games. So, I was really focused on that.

Then as I grew as a coach and started learning what other people had and started talking to other coaches around the country, etc., I realized that our department, and this is what I liked about Oklahoma State, we were very successful as a department on very little money. We weren’t OU with a blank check. We didn’t have great football teams funding us. We always had some pretty good basketball.

I think for a long time, the overall sports program did really well on really not very much money. To say that we could do that on a national level, I mean, I’m very proud of that. And particularly with our sport, we did a lot on very little. What happened then was that that became the philosophy, and that, “You’ve done so well on so little, why should we give you lots more?” So, it almost came back to bite you a little bit, and we had to get through that. Does that make sense?

Gill

Sure. And I think in later years we had to start thinking bigger. I think some in the athletic department started realizing that if we’re going to be in the big time, be in the Big Twelve, we’re going to have to have greater facilities. We’re going to have to increase our budgets.

Fischer

Right. When you have a huge shift in finances, you can have a huge shift in attitude, and so the early years, the kids were extremely passionate. And not so much the early years, I’d say most of the years I’ve coached, our kids were extremely passionate about winning. They wanted a little better motel and they wanted to travel better. You know, they wanted some better things, but if you give them too much, the passion wanes and it becomes about how much stuff they can get, how many practice uniforms, and how many pairs of shoes they get to keep.

It was always about now we were thinking more in terms of more stuff instead of just the internal passion of the game and that was a piece that I

was saddened by. I was saddened to see that. And I think it's true today. I think a lot of kids do base their decisions on the coolest stadium, you know, and their travel schedule. "Do we go to Hawaii?" and, "Do we do a lot of things that I think will be cool outside of just playing the sport because I love it?"

Gill

Between the lines.

Fischer

Between the lines.

Gill

How did you feel about the administrative support within the athletic department? Were there some times when the resources weren't there? Did you feel like they cared about your program?

Fischer

That depends on which part of my coaching career we were in. One of the hardest moments for me was—and I forget what year it was. I think it was early '90s, maybe. Not really sure, but first day of the school year, put my key in the door of our locker room, open it up, looked in it and went, "What's that?" Shut the door, looked at the number to make sure it was there. Put my key back in the door, and we didn't have a locker room anymore.

They had broken down the wall and converted our locker room to enlarge women's basketball. So, what I was looking at was women's basketball's locker room with the big TV and the couches and, you know, the little wooden beautiful lockers and things, and softball no longer had a locker room. I can't tell you the smoke that came out of my ears at that moment. I was so angry, I could spit. I had never been told. I had never been asked. I did get one question at the end of the earlier school year: "Do you use your locker room very much?" I said, "Well, on rainy days for meetings, but mostly we meet at the field." That was it, and they took that wall out and took our locker room. And I was livid.

So, we had some issues that we had to fix, and that's really one of the things that got us really interested in creating a list of Title IX things that we were demanding. We weren't asking anymore. We were starting to demand because at that point I felt we took a huge step backwards. So, we spent a couple of years getting it right. After that, I think we did have administrative support because they really understood how important it was to us to have our own space (Laughs) and our own entity. So, some things did happen that shouldn't have, but they got corrected. So, we're good. We were good.

Gill

Speaking of resources, Sandy, were you encouraged to participate in fundraising?

Fischer

Gill Yes.

Fischer *I know you and I did some of that back in the day.*

Gill You bet.

Fischer *But some areas, some sports, some schools didn't really want the women's sports programs to be out there fundraising. Were you encouraged in supporting your fundraising?*

Gill Yes. We were expected to raise about 10 percent of our budget, so we were out doing a variety of things. We would play a 100-inning game against OU, and the kids would have to go out and get pledges. We sold programs at basketball games and football games and helped with cleanups in the stadium. I mean, we did some things that a lot of the other teams did, some grunt work, actually, to fundraise. All that money went back into our budget or into our foundation that we could spend on things we really needed.

Fischer *I'm trying to imagine you looking at that softball field when you first got out there. When you came here and you looked at the facilities and you looked at the condition of the program, what were your early priorities for building the program? What did you feel had to be done to get to be a nationally competitive program?*

Gill We had to have really good athletes. We had to have a field to practice on that we could call our own, that we could access anytime, day or night. Those were the two priorities, so the very first thing I did was I had a promise when I was hired that we would have a field within a year. I accepted that promise and we did have a field within a year. So, that was good. I didn't know which kids were on scholarships, so my first day I held open tryouts. I had advertised them, you know, little ads in the paper and stuff, you know, "We're having open tryouts on campus." I didn't know who was on scholarship, and I kept what I deemed the best sixteen, seventeen kids out of ninety. We had ninety kids show up.

Fischer *Ninety?*

Gill So, it took us two weeks to just whittle it down.

Fischer *Did that surprise you that ninety showed up?*

Gill In the early days like that, no. You could have a tryout today and have two show up. I mean, it dwindled over the years. We held tryouts, actually, every year to get a good walk-on or two, and the numbers that showed up dwindled dramatically as the years went by. So, I ended up

cutting one of my players that was on scholarship, and I didn't even know she was. Then I had an injury and brought her back. It was really an interesting process, and the kids that we had were excellent, excellent athletes. So, whoever was here before—I forget who was here right before me. I know her name. I just can't remember it. She had brought in some very good athletes from Tulsa and Oklahoma City on scholarship, and so I was lucky enough to start off with a pretty good talent pool.

Gill *What were some of your early goals for your program, some milestones you had?*

Fischer We wanted to win our conference championship and we wanted to do that really quick. We wanted to let University of Oklahoma know and University of Kansas know (these were all established strong programs) that “Here, we’re coming. I don’t know how fast we’re going to get there, but we’re coming.” So, we really cleaned up the program as far as attitude and hustle and basic knowledge of the game, etc., and really found passion in these kids. And I have to say, they bought in because we finished, oh, it was second in the Big Eight tournament the first year and won it the second year. I mean, we were on a path.

Gill *You were coming fast.*

Fischer Well, I think it came from the pro league because losing wasn't an option in the pro league. That was instilled in me by the legend Joan Joyce who was, she was my mentor. And it wasn't emotional. Losing is just really not an option, so this is what we're going to have to do. We don't have to practice long, but we have to practice smart. I think part of that was really a good thing in that we didn't have five-hour practices and get bored and do that. We did what we had to do and went home. Don't get me wrong. These kids like to party, and they like to do their thing, but when they got between the lines, it was really important to them.

Gill *Speaking of some of those players, who were some of the key players that you recruited in those early years that you built your program around? Could you share some names and some experiences?*

Fischer Well, the kids that I inherited were some of the best athletes ever. Dr. Jan Drummond was right here from Stillwater. She was our center fielder and our very first All-American. She was a slow pitch player and made the conversion very quickly. We had Pam Harper. She was All-American several times, from Tulsa. We had Tina Schell. She was a freshman pitcher when I got here, from Tulsa. Very good pitcher. We had Nancy Teehee that I stole from OU. You know, we had Jan Krug, an awesome shortstop. Diane Van Fossen, an awesome second baseman.

Gill *So, the cupboard wasn't bare when you got here?*

Fischer No, and these were kids that had played against each other in high school and summer ball and things like that, so for them to gel very quickly was pretty natural because they were mostly all Oklahoma kids.

Gill *So, who were some of your first recruits? You were talking about Teehee, your pitcher, but others like that?*

Fischer Sure. Gosh we had so many All-Americans. We had, you know, Michele Smith, who was on the Olympic team and we had Jamie Foutch who ended up being a three-time All-American, out of Edmond.

Gill *Was this in the early years?*

Fischer Well, those were kind of the middle years. They all kind of blend together for me, to be really honest with you. (Laughs)

Gill *I was trying to remember. What years did Smith pitch?*

Fischer She was late '80s. She's going into the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame this fall.

Gill *That's what I heard. She does commentary for the College World Series?*

Fischer Yes, ESPN and she played in Japan for eighteen, nineteen years as a professional and made well over six figures a year. I mean, she was quite successful in Japan.

Gill *They loved that tall, blonde-headed gal in Japan, didn't they?*

Fischer Oh boy, yes. But we've had several Olympians go through our program, all of them pitchers. Football has the running backs, and we have the pitchers.

Gill *Sandy, you had an extraordinary twenty-three year coaching career at OSU and we cited some of those clips as I was opening the interview. Let's look at your total career and reflect back on that if we can, okay?*

Fischer Sure, sure. What would you like to know?

Gill *Over the twenty-three years, what changed in terms of training techniques? What was different from the time you came in to when you left?*

- Fischer** In the beginning, the coaching staff was pretty much in charge of everything with the exception of we always had an athletic trainer for emergencies, a student usually. But we were in charge of creating a weight lifting program and, of course, practices and academics and trying to get kids with tutors and different things. So, early on we were expected to do almost all of it.
- As the years went by and the money came and things became more specialized, obviously, then all of those entities kind of spread out. We sent the kids to the guy that set up the weight program. They went to the training room separately. They went to the academic services unit separately. So, really, the coaches became very focused on just training them in the softball skills. We would often times have the track coach come and teach them proper techniques of running and explosion and those kinds of things. And during this very same transition, the kids are now getting private hitting instructors, private pitching instructors, and all of that happening in the summertime and as they're growing up in high school, so there's much more instruction.
- Gill** *Was this the impact of Title IX? They were coming out of better high school programs because of that impact of Title IX in public schools?*
- Fischer** Title IX may have impacted that, but I think it was more the parents realizing scholarship availability. I think parents were training their kids to get in line for a scholarship was the biggest impetus.
- Gill** *Kind of in their summer programs after they saw there are some talents there, they looked to refine those.*
- Fischer** Sure, yes. So, the whole system kind of changed. The high school athletics kind of went out the window a little bit. It was more the travel ball teams because those teams would go to tournaments, and that's where the coaches would go to recruit, where there were a hundred teams instead of going to individual high school games. The parents were paying thousands of dollars to put these kids on summer teams to get them to the tournaments to get exposed.
- That was another significant difference between AIAW and NCAA. Under AIAW we could hold tryouts on campus and we could invite kids from all over the country. They could pay their own way in here to try out for a scholarship. Under NCAA, no tryouts were allowed on campus. They couldn't physically compete for us, so we had to go see them much more.
- Gill** *Was that a big shift in your career, recruiting and how you recruited?*

Fischer Yes, very much so.

Gill *Could you talk about that a little bit? What it was like when you started, to then in your later years, and what was the typical, I was going to say off-season, but there never really was an off-season.*

Fischer No there wasn't. (Laughter)

Gill *Recruiting season. How did that change and evolve?*

Fischer Well, it changed quite a bit when we could no longer hold the tryouts. We could no longer say, "Well, you didn't come and try out for us, so we had to go watch." So, we now had to have a recruiting budget because we were physically going to be flying to California, going to Colorado, Texas, wherever the big tournaments...

Gill *Summer league tournaments.*

Fischer Yes. Travel ball tournaments. And the travel ball is where kids were very specific to playing a position. In high school, they might have been a great shortstop, but they needed her to catch or they needed her—you know high school had needs. A lot of coaches stopped going to high school games to recruit. They all went out in the summer time. Then there started to be the big winter tournaments in Florida and California.

Gill *National tournaments?*

Fischer Yes. They were now having recruiting tournaments year-round. So, we were starting to go out year-round where it used to be a month or two in the summer you'd go out, see some tournaments, and you'd fly them in, give them a scholarship, and the parents were like, "Thank you, that's so exciting." Well, (Laughter) that changed. Recruiting became a much bigger burden than the actual coaching of the team.

Gill *Sandy, how did your training, practice techniques change over the years?*

Fischer You had to keep up because, like any sport, techniques changed. What we had was an influx of techniques from baseball, particularly in hitting. It used to be that our techniques in hitting in softball because it was so much faster. It was a shorter, quicker game. It wasn't a power game. Now it is a power game because we've integrated our hitting techniques with baseball. We have more of a power mentality now as opposed to manufacturing a run with bunting and all of that.

- Gill** *Short strokes?*
- Fischer** Short strokes, right. Now we've figured out because we were getting bigger, stronger, physically, then the mechanics, all the new technology in bats and balls, all of them livelier. We now were gaining tremendous distance with our swings, so our game changed to a power game. For pitchers it became very, very specific how you teach pitching techniques to get maximum velocity and spin, movement and things.
- Gill** *Did your practices become longer or shorter or more specialized?*
- Fischer** Well, a little bit more specialized. A little bit longer, but we did most of our drill work indoors in the winter time. We did a lot of strategic-type of play and a lot of inter-squad scrimmaging and creating a lot of game type situations. We did more and more of that to get them into the mental frame of competing under pressure. We would create pressure situations.
- Gill** *How did your philosophy of the game change? How did your philosophy of coaching, teaching, training, how did it evolve and change? Think about from when you started when you had a couple years of experience just as a pitching coach at Michigan State when you started off as a green coach, how did your philosophy change from that time to the end of your career?*
- Fischer** Well, I think what happened was we started to get responsibilities split up on the coaching staff. We were allowed to have two full-time assistants, and a graduate assistant, so now we were dispersing. You know, you're in charge of hitting, and you're in charge of the infield, and you're in charge of the outfield, so we each had more specificity. We each took our thing and got very specific with how we would teach it.
- Then as a coach, you have to continue to be open to change and learning and going to clinics, and at the national convention really listening to other coaches, how they did things, pick each other's brain and incorporate things. Softball coaches are very open about sharing ideas and things that work for them. You're always trying to get something new in practice or it's just, you know, after a while it's just like, "I am so bored. (Laughter) We have done this a thousand times." So, I think it was just a matter of consistently integrating new things and ideas to keep it fresh.
- Gill** *Well, how has, in your opinion, intercollegiate softball changed since you first started coaching?*

Fischer

The game is bigger, stronger, faster. The kids, they're better athletes. Some of them are better athletes, but I also think that our older athletes from years ago had much more passion. Their goal really wasn't the scholarship. Their goal was to be a winning unit. They really, really had a lot of pride in being winners and being together and having each other's back. I think that still exists, but I don't think it's as intense or as big a focal point.

I think getting the scholarship is such a focal point growing up for these kids now that even sometimes they're burned out when they get here. I think a little bit of that wanes, but the coaches, the older coaches, still have the ability to instill that passion and that love for the game to keep them focused. It keeps you focused instead of on all the stuff.

I think the parents are closer to the kids now. I think the kids with cell phones and text messaging, and I think there's a whole different line of communication between parent and child now that's very, very different. Kids went off to college years ago, and they were independent. They might call home once a week or check in or maybe go home once a month, maybe, if they're close by. And now, it's daily, multiple daily, communications with parents and things, and how it went at practice or how it went during the game or, you know, "I didn't get to play."

I do think technology has changed some of how the kids are, and it's not their fault. The parents get a little nervous about letting the kids out of their sight. You know, it's a dangerous world, so it's just different. I think they're less independent as much as they say they want to be more independent. In some ways, they're less.

Gill

Sandy, can you share some of the accomplishments of your teams over the years, some milestones of the Cowgirl softball program?

Fischer

Wow.

Gill

I know there have been a lot of highlights.

Fischer

Been a lot of highlights. I would say the one thing I wish we'd have done that we didn't accomplish, or haven't accomplished yet, is win a Big Twelve championship. We won so many of the Big Eight championships and so many in a row that when we merged with the Texas schools and went to the Big Twelve, we were not successful. We were successful getting to the championship, but we didn't win it. That's one thing, I think, that's a goal that has been missed so far.

Gill

How many times did you get to the championship game in the Big Twelve play?

- Fischer** Just my last year, just my last year coaching. I know. So close, yet so far. OU won, but we won lots of championships, and we had incredibly successful kids. When Michele Smith was here we were ranked number one in the nation all season long and should have been in the national championship and missed it by a pitch, you know, that kind of thing. And we could have won it that year, without any question we were the best team.
- Gill** *I've got to ask. Where did you find Michele? Is there a story behind how you recruited her?*
- Fischer** There is a story behind that, and that involves Margaret Rebenar. Margaret being my assistant coach, we got a phone call in the office one day from a softball camp out in the Poconos of Pennsylvania looking for an instructor because somebody got sick at the last minute, and they had heard that we had done some other camps. I said I couldn't go, so I asked Margaret if she wanted to go. It was extra money. Remember, now, we were doing the fireworks stand. (Laughter)
- Gill** *I had forgotten that.*
- Fischer** She said, "Sure." So, she went and was an instructor at a camp in the Poconos, and Michele was there. Michele was such a late bloomer. She didn't even start pitching until the summer after her sophomore year in high school and only pitched because they didn't have one in her high school, and she loved her coach. Michele was a first baseman. So, she went to that camp specifically to learn pitching, and Margaret was a pitcher, so she was teaching pitching. That's how that union happened. So, Margaret actually discovered her and came home and said, "Oh..." (Laughs)
- Gill** *Got a diamond in the rough.*
- Fischer** "...we've got a diamond in the rough and we need to get an out-of-state scholarship. We need to insist on it." So, we recruited against Cal[ifornia] Berkeley, Cal State Fullerton and some other schools to get her. It was a tough get because once people saw her, they saw her potential. She was extremely raw. She didn't really have a lot of pitches. She was just learning, and she was great. Michele learned a lot at Oklahoma State. Trust me, she learned a lot, but she got so much better after she left because she took what she learned and just developed it. She couldn't have learned everything in the four years she was here. She started so late. So, she got her fundamentals here and then just excelled and kept working on them.

- Gill** *And you mentioned she played, fourteen, fifteen, eighteen seasons in the Japanese league. Are there any professional women's softball leagues in the US?*
- Fischer** Yes. There are two entities at the moment. One is called the NPF which is the National Pro Fastpitch League and they have, I believe, six teams around the country. They play each other, and it's a regular professional league based on the league I played in back in the '70s. They're trying the same thing, so they've been at that now for several years. They're just now starting to get some growth because it's been individual owners versus corporate owners, which they have in Japan.
- Then there's an entity called the PFX, the Pro Fastpitch X-treme Tour, and I coached on that tour for the last several years. Two teams go out into youth tournaments and put on clinics, and we do sessions about recruiting, and we do coaches clinics. Then our two teams play each other, and they're made up of Olympians, All-Americans, names that kids would know in the softball world.
- Gill** *Signing autographs.*
- Fischer** Signing autographs until we're blue. You know a lot of hands-on hugging and watching kids play and clapping for them, a lot of interaction. It's just kind of a neat deal for the kids to really rub elbows, and particularly when we were in the Olympics. These Olympians were very highly regarded and well received, and it was a fun tour. Now that the Olympians are no more, per se...
- Gill** *Is that a disappointment for you, to say the least?*
- Fischer** Oh, it's a horrible disappointment. It's an injustice because our sport was just booming all over the world, and boom. That fast, it's over.
- Gill** *Working to get it back, I hope?*
- Fischer** Well, they're working, but so far, no luck.
- Gill** *Switching just a little bit on your players, over the years were you satisfied with the academic performance of your players?*
- Fischer** For the most part. You always have a couple that, you know, when you have a team the size of a softball team, there's always a couple. We graduated, oh, between 90, 95 percent of our kids.
- Gill** *Really, that high?*

Fischer We were that high.

Gill *Wow.*

Fischer Yes, and it was important because the number one reason they should be here is that we matched up in their academic interests.

Gill *That's great. I didn't realize it was that high.*

Fischer Yes, we were extremely high, and it goes hand in hand with success. Academic achievement is a whole other challenge, so it goes hand in hand.

Gill *Looking back over your coaching career at OSU, anything you'd change if you had a chance to do it differently? It's hypothetical, but just looking back.*

Fischer That's a good question because you coach as you go, and you do the best you can at that moment in time.

Gill *You're a different coach ten years down the road than you were before.*

Fischer Yes, you are. I had the same assistant coach forever and ever and ever and ever, and that was probably, for most of the time, that probably added a great deal of stability. Then again on the other hand, I'm not sure if we didn't stagnate a little bit because we were almost too familiar all the way through. So, maybe had some different sprinklings of different folks on the coaching staff might have been a good thing.

As far as the players and everything else, yes, I think we could have hit a little more or we probably could have done a few better things at practice. We may have stagnated there upon occasion, too, and over time you can only do so much, but not so much. I think we were successful enough, and we had good chemistry on the coaching staff for a very, very long time, and we had really good players. We had three Olympians come through and lots of All-Americans, and when you have good talent, you can go a long way.

Gill *Good things happen, don't they?*

Fischer Good things happen, yes.

Gill *Good players do make coaches better coaches. (Laughs)*

Fischer Maybe been a little closer to the parents. The parents, they were always an entity that were in the background and maybe should have pulled

them in a little bit more. It's hard to say.

Gill *Sandy, some special memories that you have during your OSU career, can you share some of those with us?*

Fischer Wow. I think being named National Coach of the Year was an overwhelming moment because it really wasn't just me. It was the coaching staff, it was always the players, and it was a magical year that we had.

Gill *The year you were ranked number one?*

Fischer Yes, yes, and, so, to get that honor out of all the coaches around the country was quite overwhelming. Being inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2008, after the whole thing was over for a long time, was really touching. It was really, professionally, very touching to be honored by your peers like that, so that was cool.

Gill *Sandy, again, your last year, then, that you coached, the last season was 2002?*

Fischer Two thousand one.

Gill *Two thousand one.*

Fischer Yes, and it was an interesting year. It was one of those years where we had some injuries and some different things. We knew we were on the bubble NCAA-wise, and we really thought we had done enough by getting into the Big Twelve championship that year to get us over the hump. When we weren't selected to go to the NAACs, it just made the year really disappointing. It was sad, but we had had other years where we didn't make it, but we made it most of the time.

The years we didn't make it were really devastating because we were used to winning and going and continuing on and that kind of thing. After you do something over twenty years in your life, I think you get to a point where you get almost saturated with it and it tends to wane a little bit. I think if you look at anybody's coaching career, you know, it'll have hills and valleys and that kind of thing. I think today athletic directors are allowing fewer valleys. I think they're under such pressure to win that coaches now live under a much different pressure than I probably ever did.

Gill *It must have taken a tremendous amount of energy and untold sacrifices, Sandy, on your part to build up a nationally competitive and recognized program from scratch, truly from scratch, and keep it there for so long.*

What kept you going for those twenty-three, twenty-four years? What was your source of strength? What kept you going?

Fischer You know, I think years ago that my mother instilled in me possibilities that everything is possible, and I tried to give that to my players, that no matter what, no matter who you are or whatever, you're blessed to be here and be a part of this team. And we're blessed to be here together at this moment in time, and if we pool our talents and our energies and our efforts, how far we go is endless. It can take us all the way.

I think the kids, the majority of the time, really enjoyed testing their endless possibilities as a team and as individuals. We weren't always loving each other but when they got between the lines and played together, they still performed really, really well because they loved the sport and they loved playing for Oklahoma State.

Gill *So, a lot of your passion's derived from seeing the development of the young ladies that you worked with?*

Fischer Yes. I think my ability to inspire them was better than my ability to teach them how to hit, if that makes any sense. And I think sometimes you just have to tap a person's possibilities, and then they will bloom. They become easier learners when they want to learn, and they're willing to go further for you if there's a willingness to go forward. I think, probably toward the end, that willingness changed. I don't know. I think was burned out. I think at some point you just do the same thing, and I had loss. I had a great tragedy in my family. I had lost four family members, my entire family to cancer.

Gill *Your parents and your brother and sister?*

Fischer Yes. I lost my father, mother, brother and sister the decade before I ended my coaching career, or it was ended. So, each time one of those tragedies happened, it took a little bit out of me. And by the time we got to the last one which was my sister, and I was her primary caregiver during the active spring season, then, you know, by that time I think my energies were drained. My emotional energies, my ability to inspire, you know, my love of life and all that, it just changed a little bit.

Gill *And, as I recall, to take care of your sister, you had to step away for about three months, too, from the program, didn't you?*

Fischer Yes, yes, so the assistant coaches had to take over for three months while I was gone right in the middle of the active part of going to tournaments and our season. So, it was very hard on them, it was very hard on our players, and it was very, very hard on me to be away

because I was totally torn. I mean, I really needed to be with my sister.

Gill *Then again, coming back had to be tough for you, but for Margaret and your other staff members.*

Fischer Very tough.

Gill *She's finally, after all these years, got a chance to lead, and then she's got to step back again.*

Fischer Sure.

Gill *It must've been tough.*

Fischer It was a very tough shift. That all happened over several years. That was like '98, '99, and so for those several years between there and 2001, it was just a real tough thing for us all to try to shift back and all that. And the players probably got caught in the middle of that a little bit and so it was just one of those things that probably wasn't good for our program.

Gill *So, the year that your sister, you had to take care of her and finally she died, what year was that?*

Fischer Ninety-eight. That was '98, and that was our last time that we went to the College World Series. Yes. So, I mean, life just presents a lot of different things, and one thing will affect another.

Gill *Well, speaking of that, Sandy, is there life after coaching?*

Fischer Oh, Lord, God, yes. (Laughter)

Gill *Can you talk about some of your activities when you retired from OSU?*

Fischer I miss OSU, and I miss my salary, (Laughs) and, of course, I miss the kids and coaching, but I live on forty acres and I have horses. So, I'm partially retired, and yet on the other half I've done some coaching in the summers on the pro league, and I've worked part time for a little company that sells some products for our sport, and I'm an inventor. I've invented several training aids that are out on the market now.

Gill *Can you mention a couple of those?*

Fischer Well, one is called a Tee Stacker, and really what it does is allow you to stack two or three balls on a standard tee, a hitting tee, and if you are properly on-plane at contact when you hit the top ball, then it leaves, and the Tee Stacker leaves, and the next ball is ready to hit right away.

However, if you're off-plane and you're not swinging correctly or well, then it compresses the stacker and then the bottom ball will fall off. So, you know right away whether you were on-plane or not. It's about quality of swings versus quantity because you can get really bad habits off the tee. You can swing wrong fifty times and ingrain it in your mind, so it's to help kids get it right off the tee.

Gill *Practice doesn't make perfect, but perfect practice makes perfect.*

Fischer There you go. And the most recent one out is called the Hand Tee, the Precision Hand Tee. So, it's a handheld tee so the coach can put that ball at any point in the contact zone, in, out, high or low. They can move it. On every swing it can be in a different spot, so it's kind of a really cool entity too.

Gill *So, you're involved with that company that markets it and promotes the product?*

Fischer Oh yes. I've got a book full of products. (Laughs)

Gill *So, you do camps, and you work with coaches.*

Fischer I haven't done any camps of late, and I haven't really done much speaking of late. I have done some recruiting seminars. I've gone out into some of the communities in Edmond and different places and talked to parents about recruiting and the coach's side of it so that they can understand what coaches are thinking. Yes, I keep my toe in it a little bit.

Gill *So, here's one of those really philosophical questions for you Sandy. How do you hope people remember Sandy Fischer?*

Fischer Oh, wow.

Gill *Thinking back on it, talking about players, coaches, people that have known you in your life in your coaching career, how do you hope people will remember you?*

Fischer That's a really interesting question. I hope particularly the players remember that I always had their good at heart, that they were a part of the group and that my job was to guide the group. Along the way I hope I had some personal influence, and I hope I was helpful to most. I know not to all, you know, the poor kids that got cut from the team, this, that or the other. I mean, there will always be some folks I wish I could talk to personally and say it was never personal. I hope they remember me as someone who really wanted to help them move forward, not only as a player, but mostly as a person. That's what I hope. I don't know.

Competitive, fun, strong, humorous, cantankerous sometimes, you know, but always with the right thing in mind for the end that we were going to progress to a point further than they ever thought they could go.

Gill *Sandy, what do you want to do with the rest of your life, (Laughter) besides play with your horses?*

Fischer There you go. I want to be happy, and I want to be happy to know that if I died today, I felt like I left some good behind here at Oklahoma State and with my family and friends, and I just want to live each day with sunshine in my heart knowing that in the end, life really is good. It's a journey, and it's what we make of it. It's what we make of it.

Gill *Let me step back, if it's okay, and ask you a question. You struggled for so many years, you and coaches of women's sports. We talked about that earlier in the interview, about equity, equality, equal pay and these issues, a really, particularly contentious issue that you alluded to, and that I visited in another interview with Ann Pitts Turner, a long-time golf coach at Oklahoma State University.*

Fischer Right.

Gill *That issue of equal pay has really been a sore spot, I know, for a lot of you.*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *I want to ask you your perspective. You know, Ann had, back in the '92 and '93, in that era, a lawsuit over that issue of equal pay which she actually won. I know it was tough on her emotionally to have to take that action against her school. She graduated from here, and the school she loved. How important was the outcome of that litigation, and how did it impact you and other women's programs here, do you think, at Oklahoma State?*

Fischer When she first decided to do it, I was shocked because I knew the ramifications would be very, very strong, and I truly admired her and totally supported her in it. It was very personal for her, and she took a lot of slack for it and some of it not very good from folks in the community, etc., and it was a hardship for her. I don't think many people really realize when you sue the university, how hard that is. It is hard, but she was one of many pioneer women around the country that were doing just that: equal pay for equal work.

In the coaching world, if you are given the same number of athletes to coach, the same budgets and the same everything, and you come to work

every day just like your male counterpart, then you should be paid. It's pretty simple. There were great inequities that she was fighting for, and I was a witness at her trial. I was one of her witnesses and truly believed in what she did, and so when she won, it was a step up for all of us. You know, the athletic director talked to us very differently then, and some compensation came along the way, and all of a sudden we had contracts.

We had had no contracts. We were year-to-year, and if they were done with you, they were done with you. So, now we had contracts. Some people thought that was a real positive and some people didn't because then at the end of that contract you were always reviewed. There was a decision to be made, whereas if you were on year-to-year, if you're winning, things keep going and nobody thinks about it. So, there were people who thought that was a positive and that might be a negative. So, there was good and bad, but ultimately Ann created an environment where the athletic directors around the country, I mean, she was one of many, had to step up and say, "You know, we haven't been paying them enough and it's not right. It's not fair." So, she really was a pioneer, and she took it on the chin, and it was very personal for her.

Gill *Sandy, I understand that there were two or three coaches that got some fairly significant adjustments in salary pretty quickly after she won that case. Is that right?*

Fischer Yes, some did. I don't think mine was particularly fast, but it was faster. It was on a much faster track, and mine was based on, and most of them were based on, salaries of all the other coaches in your conference, and then top twenty teams. They started doing some formulas to start basing it on which was quite helpful.

Gill *Having thought about that perspective, I think I hear you saying that that really caused them to step back and really look at the salaries based on some facts, analyzing and doing contracts in a much more professional approach to it than they had been before.*

Fischer Absolutely. Yes, absolutely. So, she was a pioneer for us really in this department, and I will forever be thankful and grateful that she did that because it was hard on her. Yes, it was a great thing.

Gill *Sandy, again, thank you. I know this has been a fairly extensive interview. It provided us with great information. Thank you for sharing that.*

Fischer Oh, no problem.

Gill *And congratulations on just an outstanding career. I'll finish where I*

started. You're a legend in OSU softball.

Fischer Well, thank you very much. It has been a pleasure to be a part of Oklahoma State.

Gill *Sandy, one question I did forget to ask you. One thing that I had heard alluded to in a couple of interviews I've done is that there was a question, maybe a concern about it, as you look at women's sports at Oklahoma State University, there's only one women's coach right now in the program. How do you feel about that?*

Fischer (Laughs) How much tape you got? Because of where I started here and because of the opportunity I was given, I feel very, very strongly that women coaches should be hired when at all possible to coach a women's sport. It's interesting because when the salaries were so low, men were not interested in it. As we progressed, and this was actually predicted by the AIAW years, thirty years ago, predicted that it would come to this, that the salaries would get so good that the men would start to infiltrate the coaching ranks of women. I didn't believe it at the time. I totally believe it today, and I think there are many reasons for it. I think in our sport in particular, and I can speak to softball, we now have athletic directors that believe if you've played baseball in your history, you would transcend and make a very good softball coach. I think athletic directors sometimes also feel more comfortable dealing with men than they do with women.

Gill *Because most athletic directors are men.*

Fischer Absolutely, and I think there is an alliance there. Whether they will admit it or not, I don't know. I also think that for women, if you lose a job as a woman, there must have been a reason, and it's really hard to transcend that and move on. If you lose a job as a man, then you're just a better fit somewhere else. There's a double standard in hiring and rehiring women, so with a double whammy, women cannot transcend and go coach in baseball, so that door is closed. This door is closing that we have currently because more and more men are being hired. We used to be 90 percent female coaches coaching female sports. We are now below 40 percent. We are now between 30 and 40 percent women coaching now.

Gill *Well, Sandy, is it because there's not an adequate coaching pool out there?*

Fischer A lot of women, once out, stay out because they have fought the battles for so long that it wears them out, and so they stay out. Players are so burned sometimes from playing their college career and having spent

their whole childhood getting a scholarship then playing, they drop out, and their interest in coaching has waned. The interest in coaching for women in the '90s was pretty high. I had lots of players asking to be student assistants, and, "I want to coach, too," and, "Tell me how to do it and where to go," and we had lots of interest. It has waned in this past decade because I think they also see the trend, but in some ways they're burned out.

It is an interesting thing that's happening, and philosophically an athletic director has to take a stand and protect women's sports by at least having a member of a coaching staff or two, or the majority of the coaches on that staff should be women because that's equity, and women play the sport their whole life. They should know what they're doing, and they should be given the chance to have that expertise rewarded. We're moving in a direction where athletic directors truly believe the male coaches are the more successful coaches, and that's really hard for me to watch. That's really hard for me to watch.

Gill *What do you think it's going to take to break that trend? And, again, I want to ask the question because I'm not sure that I fully understood your question, but is there an adequate pool?*

Fischer Yes.

Gill *I kind of hear you saying that the pool seems to be decreasing of, maybe, women who want to coach?*

Fischer It's decreasing, yes, because the opportunities are less. If we were committed philosophically to hiring women to coach women's sports, then the job pool is bigger, but the job pool is shrinking for women because more men are being hired. Not that male coaches are bad. I'm not saying that, but I think a staff should be a blend, a good blend, and I think that the best coach, when at all possible, should be hired. I know athletic directors today are out there, and I know that they're saying, "We hired the best person. So, based on our interview group, we thought he was the best person," or "she was the best person," but more often than not, it's a male.

What happens, too, is that they will give a male assistant coach an opportunity to be a head coach quicker than they will give a female assistant coach the opportunity to be a head coach. Sometimes it's money. Sometimes it's cheaper to hire the assistant into a head job, and "I think this guy is better than this gal." There is a philosophy the athletic directors have: "Is it important to try to maintain the equity of men and women coaches? Is that important to me as an athletic director? Is that important to the future of female sports?" And to really

understand deep down inside if it is or it isn't to that athletic director. The hiring practices then will show you that. That's my opinion, but a lot of times, you know, I think in their mind they're not that deep into philosophy. I think they're trying to find the best coach they can at that moment, or whoever is brought to them is the best coach, but I think when push comes to shove, the female should be given the opportunity. And if she fails, then replace her with a man.

Really, honestly, it's really hard. I think we've gone backwards. I think we're going backwards in the hiring of women, and it's always interesting to see how many women are coaching at the World Series versus the male coaches.

Gill *How has that been in recent years?*

Fischer We still have more women than men, but it's becoming more fifty-fifty, and so there is this little shift, you know. And I like the guys. I know a lot of the guy coaches, and they're good people, and I'm not saying that they're not, but their tendency then will be to hire one female and one male a lot of times. So, you end up many staffs that are two male coaches versus one female, and it really should be the other way around. It really should be if we're going to continue to progress and really open the door for more women to come into the coaching pool. They feel stifled because you don't see many sixty-year-old- or fifty-five- or sixty-five-year-old women who can just jet off and get another career. I mean, there are men still coaching at the college level that are eighty years old.

Gill *Wow.*

Fischer Definitely. Football, basketball, probably. If you're sixty-five, you're still young and coaching. If you're sixty-five, you are so over if you are a female. You're so done, so there's inequities underlying. Whether they'd be admitted to, I don't know. That's just my personal opinion. Oklahoma State needs to hire more women. We're very out of balance right now, and it doesn't bode well for us philosophically holding up the great attributes of Title IX. I mean, it doesn't show parents, "I want my daughter to go there because they really invest in what's going on for her future." I don't know. I just think we've got to come back to the center here sometime. We'll be a much more balanced department.

Gill *I appreciate it, (Laughter) and with that we'll sign off. Thank you.*

Fischer Okay. Thank you.

----- *End of interview* -----