

## Reflections from WT with Athletic Director Michael McBroom

Randy Ray: All right. You are listening to Reflections from WT. This is episode number 39. I'm Randy Ray, your host. And I'm joined today by Dr. Walter Wendler, the 11th President of West Texas A&M, and a good friend of mine, the Director of Athletics, Michael McBroom. Glad you guys are here.

President Wendler: Good to be here, Randy.

Michael McBroom: Great to be here, Randy.

Randy Ray: Michael, I'm just going to start out by talking about what a great year we've had, both academically and athletically.

Michael McBroom: It has. It's been another one. And I think I'm most proud of the consistency that we've been able to demonstrate through the years, and especially coming through COVID. But this will show as one of our very best years ever, not only on the competition side, we won another national championship this time in women's track. And a lot of our teams won conference championships in advance. But I think the thing I'm most proud of is that we've done it with students who are also athletes. And we had the highest GPA we've ever had. We were above a 3.0 for the first time. And our graduation rate was up another 8% to an all-time high. So, for me, the important thing has always been we do it right at WT, and that means we have students who are competitive. And again, we'll be in the top 10 in the nation in terms of Division 2 programs overall in athletic success, and our academic marks are the highest they've ever been. And that, to me, is fantastic.

Randy Ray: Do you sit down with the coaches and talk to them about that, about the academic side?

Michael McBroom: To be honest, no. I mean, we just have our benchmarks, and we want every team to have above a 3.0 GPA. And we want our graduation rates and every sport to be above the national average for those sports. And we set those targets over a decade ago. And I don't have to sit down and say, "Here are the goals." We are blessed to have a ton of leaders inside the program. And it's not just athletics. I think it's across the university. But in athletics, one thing that we all are driven by is once we have success in athletics, the scoreboard very quickly goes back to zero and you have to do it again.

And we know in our program and in our department, we expect to win championships. Well, that's what we tell parents and students when they're here. "When you get here, you're going to compete for a championship, but you're also going to get your degree, and you're going to have a chance to land a great job and provide for your family going forward." And it's all a part of the

experience. And so, we don't really talk about, "Hey, you have to have a 3.0 this year." It's just in our culture now.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, I want to dovetail off that. I mean, this is real general. How important are athletics to a university?

President Wendler: Well, they're critically important, especially to an institution like ours, that we don't just represent our students. We represent our region. West Texas A&M University is the panhandle. And we are a place where fathers bring their kids on a Saturday afternoon for a football game, or Wednesday night for a basketball game, or whatever it may be, or for a volleyball game, softball, baseball, whatever it is. This is a place where young people get to aspire to something greater in themselves, a competitive spirit, do a good job, and so on and so forth. And it's not just our campus students. It's the whole community. So, when you ask me how important athletics is, well, I can't say it's second to none, but there is a table that is arrayed with a lot of important missions. Obviously, academics, and graduation rates, and keeping our costs low, that's important in everything, but inter-collegiate athletics is on that table.

It's not in the back of the room somewhere that, oh, by the way, we do this too. It is part of who we are. That's one of the reasons I think that our GPAs are where they are, and our team successes is where they are. I'm going to say this. When I talked with Hunter Hughes when we were hiring Hunter, I said, "What do you think the football GPA is?" And it was 2.2 or something like that. It was not very high. This year, they're approaching 2.8. And I told him, I said, "Until that GPA gets at 3.0, that's going to be my primary concern. After that, all I care about is the one loss record." I want successful program in every sport.

I'm so thankful we've had tremendous showings. I'm not going to start listing the sports, because it's nearly every one of them. We don't have many weak links on this campus at all. Women's track this year, and I'll tell you, but for a little bit of a step at start, we would've been national championship. And man, I'm not complaining about that kind of thing. Michael doesn't do it. Track coach doesn't do it. I'm not going to do it. But the bottom line is, we were within a frog's hair of getting two national championships in track.

Randy Ray: Amazing.

President Wendler: It's amazing. And by the way, people in the community know it.

Randy Ray: They do.

President Wendler: And they like it. They're proud of it. And yeah, football is the big thing. We've got a big facility and a beautiful facility, and a great set of coaches, and good teams, and all that sort of stuff. But these other sports that don't occupy the front seat all the time, people like to see us be successful. We've got to track history here, a running history at WT. We had a donor who's passed away now.

I'm not going to mention his name, but he was very interested in the track program. And he wanted us to be a national powerhouse in track. And you would've never known it. I don't think that guy ever ran 100 yard dash. He just liked track. But that's the way it is.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Michael, how long have you been here now? I think you and I came here about the same time.

Michael McBroom: About the same time. I started in 2000, I believe.

Randy Ray: 2000. Yeah.

Michael McBroom: And then became AD in 2006.

Randy Ray: Yeah. What's the best part of your job?

Michael McBroom: Oh, the students.

President Wendler: Oh, I thought he was going to say he gets to work with Walter Wendler.

Randy Ray: So, you served under three presidents?

Michael McBroom: Three. As AD, two presidents.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Michael McBroom: Pat O'Brien and Walter Wendler. And my peers around the country, they ask me that question a lot, "How's your president?" I said, "Well, you're only going to go as far as be successful as we have been, because of the great leadership we've had through almost two decades at this institution." And that's no disrespect to Russell Long. Russell Long was not my president. Ed Harris was the AD. And I have to give a lot of credit to Russell Long and Ed Harris, because coming out of the '80s and early '90s at this institution, athletically speaking, it was a train wreck.

Randy Ray: Have you had the longest tenure as an AD?

Michael McBroom: I don't know. I don't measure that. I don't know. Maybe.

Randy Ray: I think maybe you do.

Michael McBroom: It's pretty long in terms of just, president is generally what, five to seven years?

President Wendler: Nowadays, that's the average. And by the way, the record holder at WT is President J.A. Hill, 30 years, three decades.

Randy Ray: You're going to beat him, I think.

President Wendler: No, no, no. I'd be like Methuselah, if that happened. That ain't happening. Not happening. But anyway, yeah. Consistency is important in any endeavor, obviously.

Michael McBroom: Right.

President Wendler: You've been teaching for 20 years, nearly. 15. We 60 what?

Randy Ray: No, 20.

Michael McBroom: 20, here. Yeah.

President Wendler: 20 years here. The radio and television programs here are strong, partly because of your consistent effort, and others. Not just you, but you get a band of brothers and sisters that work together to make a program sing, and that's what makes it happen.

Randy Ray: Yeah. You know what I think it also is, and I think you guys have it too. I think it's not only a passion for what we do, but a passion for the place.

Michael McBroom: Yeah, absolutely. 100%.

Randy Ray: I bleed maroon. I mean, I got my undergrad here. This place changed my life. I love this place, and that's part of the reason why I want to do the best I can here.

Michael McBroom: When I think to Dr. Wendler's point that I think you and I share, when did you get here, Randy?

Randy Ray: 2002.

Michael McBroom: Two. Okay.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Michael McBroom: I know you feel this, I do too, a great responsibility to the alumni and the region, to deliver the very best we can do. And I think this campus has a lot of people like that, that love the place, but also love the impact the place has on the region and the community, and we take that responsibility very seriously.

Randy Ray: So, I don't know if you ever answered this. Tell me again. When you come to work every day, what do you look forward to more than anything else?

Michael McBroom: I love being around the people.

Randy Ray: Students, or your staff?

Michael McBroom: Both. Because it's funny. We have many people on staff now that were previously student athletes.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Michael McBroom: And so, I've been here long enough to see that cycle. It's fun to come to work every day. I love to win. I'm a competitor, so I mean, the scoreboard's important to me. I love senior days. Senior days I think are my favorite days, because I generally can remember the recruiting visits when they came in.

Randy Ray: And how different they are when they leave.

Michael McBroom: And different in a good way. And that's the product of a lot of pouring into the students here from faculty, from coaches, from the administration, from the community. We have some of the best boosters around. And boosters is an athletic term, but we have a lot of boosters that support students in theater and Ag. And I mean, our alumni really support the students here. And that's all part of the process. And when you get to senior day, the last time they're going to run out on the field or the court at WT at home, and those are big days and probably my favorite.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I get that. We're going to take a break. And when we come back, I'm going to step back a little bit and let you two talk about what the future of our athletic department may look like. We'll be back in 30 seconds.

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Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT. I'm talking to Dr. Walter Wendler, Michael McBroom. Dr. Wendler, how does the future of athletics tie into your vision of the future of WT, WT 125?

President Wendler: Thanks, Randy. That's a good question. This idea of this long range plan, and I'll remind people that WT 125 is what we believe we should look like on our 125th birthday, or anniversary, which is 2035. Which it's getting to be just 10 years away, which is not all that far into the future, the way things work. And athletics was an important part of that process. Every aspect of University life was an important part of that process. And we talked about issues related to intercollegiate athletics and what our primary focus was going to be. And in some ways, it was a small step for intercollegiate athletics, because of Michael's leadership, and previous leadership, because of O'Brien's leadership. O'Brien, in many ways did a fine job here. And if not for pat O'Brien, we don't have the football stadium on campus.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

President Wendler: It changed a little bit from what he was thinking, but not much. And bottom line is, he was central in that. And this idea, the intergenerational leadership, where leadership passes from one group to the next group, a friend of mine, a guy named Tom Bullock, who was the brother of Bob Bullock, who was longtime Lieutenant Governor in Texas, had an architectural firm. He was a founding member of Caudill Rowlett and Scott. His name was not on the masthead, but he was there. He eventually became the CEO, and so on. Took the firm public. When I say took it public, it was the first architectural firm listed on the New York Stock Exchange, the first one traded publicly. So, he was a big thinker, had big ideas. But what he did was integrate all aspects of practice into the focused mission of quality and moving things forward.

So, inter-collegiate athletics is a part of that. It's not some necessity that we put up with. I don't see it that way. And by the way, I don't get to every competition and every game. I can't. I've got another job to do. Michael, is there all the time, and fans are there all the time, but I just can't be everywhere. I just can't do it. And thankfully, we've got good leadership, and good fans, and boosters, and so on, that make intercollegiate athletics a significant component, and absolutely essential part of the life of West Texas A&M University. I want to see that continue, and I think that's the goals that are set out in WT 125. And again, it's this idea, Michael and I have both said it, it's serving the whole panhandle. It's not just our campus.

And I think we have, in a very positive way, focused on that. We're unapologetically focused on our region. We're not trying to compete with people in Houston, or Dallas, or any of that. We're focused on our region. And for our region, intercollegiate athletics is important. The recent gift for women's athletics from Judy is an exceedingly important gift, because we produce in the panhandle a lot of really strong women intercollegiate athletes. I don't know why. It's like it's something in the water. I think it's ranch life, farm life, the notion of being able to work hard, and so on and so forth. It's an important part of who we are. And that's why the support of intercollegiate athletics is so vital to the university.

Randy Ray: We talk a lot about teachers coming from WT. Do a lot of coaches come from?

Michael McBroom: Oh, yeah. And if you look through the high school ranks, pick any sport, UIL regional and state championships, I guarantee you there is a WT graduate coaching one of those teams, if not more.

Randy Ray: Yeah. We need to talk about that more. That's one of the things I've always said about WT is we don't brag on ourselves enough.

President Wendler: I'm doing everything I can to remedy that. But you're right. We do need to be proud of what we do, and unapologetic. We're doing a good job serving this region. As a matter of fact, I don't know how to measure this. And I'm bragging now, but I would put us up against any regional university in the nation for paying attention to regional issues, regional aspirations, and not doing that with

an apology, but doing it as first cause, basic mission, fundamental purpose. That's what we're doing.

And I think we do it very, very well. I spent a long time at Texas A&M, which is a world university, and so on. It's a little different. We are serving our region first, without apology. And by the way, I would say that any university, public or private, urban or rural, serves better when they serve locally first. I think it's just a fundamental law of nature, that when you serve locally, that becomes marketing with legs.

Randy Ray: One of the things that has been talked about in the community is a possible look at transitioning to D1. Now, before I want you guys to talk about that, let me say how much I think that we shine in D2. I mean, facility wise, and our athletes, like I say, I think we shine in D2. What do you both honestly think about that talk, transitioning to D1?

Michael McBroom: Well, I'm going to pull off of what Dr. Wendler was just saying about local, regional solutions. And there's been some talk about the Texas Athletic Conference that we've put out there, that concept. And really, that's a concept, again, to bring back a local or regional solution to a national problem. And the fact of the matter is, the NCAA is absolutely broken. Poor leadership at every level has broken the model for schools like us. We are having to react to what's going on at the power of five. And so, when you ask, is Division 1 in the future? My answer to that would be, absolutely not, not with the way things are right now.

We don't belong in the same league and competing against schools like Texas Tech. The FCS model is just a football model. You're still going to have to put your baseball, and softball, and volleyball, and soccer teams against the Texas A&Ms, the Texas, and those things, for national titles, and just for me, I don't see that. I agree with you that Division 2 has been a perfect spot for West Texas. We are able to deliver an exceptional experience for 500 students who can all compete, legitimately compete for national championship, conference championships, while getting an education and a balanced life. That, to me, is the perfect model for college athletics.

Randy Ray: And we owe a lot of that to you, man. And it's not only for the students, but it's also for the fans too.

Michael McBroom: Exactly. Somebody said this to me one time, and it has stuck with me. There is no difference, if you go in the locker room after winning a championship, the excitement, the joy, the feeling of accomplishment in that locker room is no different from an NFL team, to an FBS, FCS, Division 2, Division 3, high school, heck, an eighth grade city championship. That group is as excited for winning as they are winning the Superbowl. So, there's no difference there. I think you have to know your place, and I've held on that Division 2 has been a great place for West Texas.

With that being said, college athletics is changing and the Power 5, they need to break off and go do their thing. They need to take the billions of dollars with it, and let the rest of us who want a true college athletics model hit reset, and get the rules back to where they benefit the students. Because right now the rules punish students. And I mean the transfer portal rule is more punitive to students than it is helpful. As soon as college athletics, whatever the new model looks like, settles in, I don't know where we'll be. We could be in that, whatever the new Division 1 might look like. We could be at a Division 3. I don't know. Where we are right now, and where I foresee us being the next three to five years at least, is with this balanced model where we can deliver championship experiences to our students and our fans. And I think that's where we belong today.

President Wendler: The only thing I would answer that about this concept of the Texas Athletic Conference, the TAC, the T-A-C, we're very happy right now in Lone Star. It's a great conference. But I don't know what Michael said, and I concur 100%. We don't know what the future holds and how it's going to look. But the idea of a Texas Conference and program symmetry in the conference, everybody has football and so on and so forth, makes, to me, a lot of sense, intuitively, and in some ways, rationally. It just feels right. And the idea of championship in every sport being a statewide, a Texas championship, I think makes a lot of sense. And I think in many ways, we have programs at smaller schools in Texas that compete nationally with the big boys. Dallas Baptist University, who's in the Lone Star conference, has a tremendous baseball program. And they support it, and it's good, and so on and so forth.

I think you look at our numbers in certain programs, we can compete against a lot of big time universities in women's track. You can measure it. You can measure the speed. You can measure the events. You can see what it looks like. How all that fits together, I'm not sure. But like Michael, I concur that things are going to change, thankfully, in the future. Because this idea that all inter-collegiate athletics programs are the same doesn't make sense. But I personally am very enamored with the idea that we would have a conference that was composed of Texas schools. And somebody might say, "Well, that's a narrow vision." Not really. We would still compete for national championships, whatever the NCAA looks like in the future. That may not even be available name. That may go to the Power 5 and their NCAA, and everybody else is different.

And by the way, anybody that listens, don't think that we think there's something wrong with the big schools and the Power 5. There's not. We just can't compete at that level. It's the difference between a bicycle and a deuce and a half. We can only carry so much weight on our shoulders because we're smaller school, different aspirations, a whole host of differences. So, I personally want something that fits our aspirations. And I think something like the TAC in something like an FCS conference could be good. And we're getting ready to start a few more discussions. We've had some, but we're going to start a few more discussions. I don't know what the answer would be. The answer may be



no, it's not right, but you can't answer the question before you ask it. And that's what we're trying to do.

We had this conversation recently on some other ideas. Ideas tend to divide people. I mean, that's the definition of an idea. Some people get behind it, some people say, "No, that's not a good thing to do." And that's going to happen with this discussion on the TAC. People will say, "Well, we're not sure that's a good thing to do," and they may be right. People like Michael and the ADs along with CEOs, they'll figure it out. They'll talk through the issues and we'll see what works. But I think we have to ask the questions, because the leadership at the NCAA, and I say this guardedly, but I believe is true, has not responded to needs of universities like West Texas A&M. Period. They just haven't done it.

Randy Ray: We may not know what the future looks like, but I believe it's going to be bright when it comes to the athletic program at West Texas A&M. And Michael, we owe a lot of that to you. And so, I'm speaking for the entire university and I know I speak for Dr. Wendler, thank you for your leadership. From my perspective, the way you have even embraced my students and let them do stuff with you guys, it's been a great partnership and we all appreciate you. So, thanks for all you do.

Michael McBroom: And that goes both ways, Randy. You and I remember that old scoreboard that was out at Kimbrough back in the day.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I could tell some horror stories there.

Michael McBroom: Yeah.

President Wendler: Listen, don't load up too much on him. I'm doing his annual review next week and he's going to remind me, he's going to remember what Randy said.

Randy Ray: All right. You guys ready? Every time we have a guest, I throw them a curve ball. This one's not too tough today. It's summertime. It's vacation time. I'd like to ask both of you, mountains or beach? Dr. Wendler.

President Wendler: Beach.

Randy Ray: Really?

Michael McBroom: Mountains.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Why don't we all just go to California and we can have both at the same time.

Michael McBroom: No.

President Wendler: Evidently, the people in California don't like it much. They're all coming to Texas.

Randy Ray:

Yeah. I'm a mountain guy too. Anyway, thank you for joining us for Reflections from WT. This has been episode number 39. Please join us again next time.