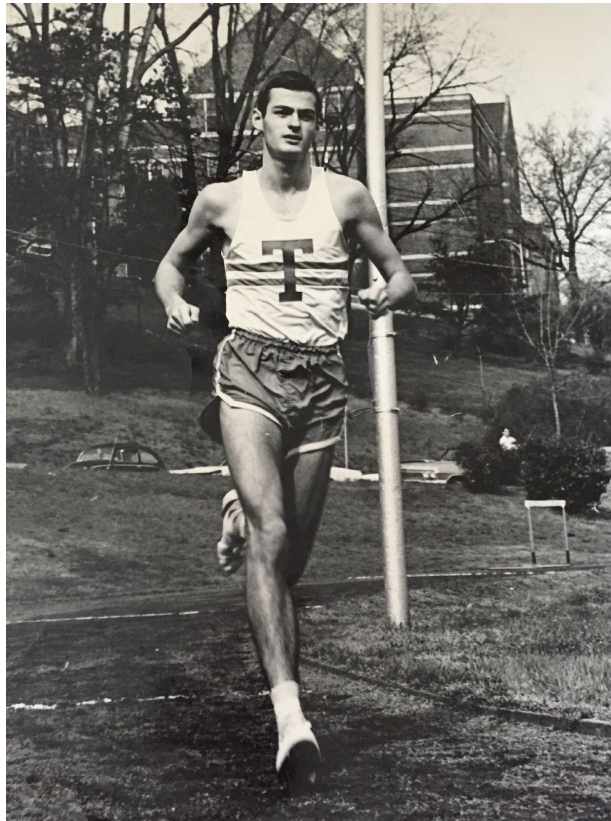


**INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN LEE WITEK
CONDUCTED BY TOM SCOTT
FRIDAY, MAY 11, 2018, KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE**

The Rohe Era Track and XC Association holds legal title and literary property rights, including copyright, to this oral history. It is not to be reproduced without permission of Charles H. Rohe and the co-chairs of the Rohe Era Track and XC Association.



TS: Norm, why don't we begin with your background? I think you were from Illinois, if I remember correctly, before you came to Tennessee. Why don't you talk about maybe your high school, and how you met Coach Rohe, and how you got to the University of Tennessee back in 1963?

NW: I was a very, very poor student. I don't know if you remember grading my English 101 papers?

TS: No. I graded your themes?

NW: Yes, when I got to Tennessee. Anyways, I was a very poor student. When I was in elementary school, the nuns told my parents that I would never graduate from high school. I was put in all the remedial programs in high school. We were a very large 6A high school, Lyons Township [LaGrange, Illinois]. It was a very classy kind of program, so I was placed in all the remedial programs.

TS: Why did the nuns come to that conclusion?

NW: Just because of all my poor grades. I had Ds and Fs.

TS: Why did you have Ds and Fs?

NW: I shouldn't even say it. My parents went through their whole lives without ever reading a book. They only had fourth and fifth grade educations. To them, education was not something that was important at all, so they never asked me about my grades. They didn't care whether I had the Ds and Fs. When I went to high school, I was put in all the remedial programs. I took all the wood shop and machine shop courses. Then my sophomore year, I ran one of the fastest 600s in a PE class. The track and cross country coach came up and said, "You're pretty good. How about coming out for cross country and track?" I said, "Yes, I love running." I always loved running, so I went out and competed in my sophomore, junior and senior years.

At the end of my junior year, I qualified for state. I was the only one in the school that qualified. Coming back from the state meet, the coach says, "If you really work hard, you can get a scholarship to go to college." I said, "I can't afford that," and he goes, "You can probably run well enough that you can get a scholarship some place." I said, "But what kind of courses do you need?" He said, "What are you taking?" He said, "You've got to go to your guidance counselor." I'm telling this story because I was actually inducted into the Lyons Township High School Hall of Fame. They were hearing the story. I was telling them that my mentors, the two track and cross country coaches, said, "You need to go to the guidance counselor and change your courses to college prep."

So I actually went into the counselor and said, "My coach told me I need to change from what I've got now to college prep." She goes, "What do you want to do?" "I'm going to go to college." She pulled my file. I had never been in there. She goes, "I'll be honest with you. You couldn't make it at the community college on the third floor of the building. I think you're making a big mistake." I said, "My coach told me I have to do this." They put me in college prep English, all the science classes, and everything else. Anyways, I ran a fast enough time

that I was in *Track and Field News*. I set the field house record over at Morton High School. Connie Smith was the track and cross country coach at Morton High School.

TS: He was later coach here [cross country coach, 1969 and 1970].

NW: Right, and he was also very good friends with Coach Rohe. He called up Coach Rohe and said, "There's a half-miler up here. You ought to take a look at this guy." Tennessee sent Thad Talley who was a graduate assistant coach over there to the state meet and talked to me about possibly coming to Tennessee. My grades were terrible. I had full scholarships to every school in the Big 10, but could not get into any of them. When I visited Tennessee, Coach Rohe goes, "I think I can take care of all this." I didn't realize this until a year or two ago when coach came to my retirement party, and he was talking to his wife about it. He said, "You have no idea what kind of strings I had to pull to get this guy in. He was in bad shape." Anyways, he wound up making it so that I could actually get into school here. So, when I went back home, I decided that Tennessee was probably where I needed to go.

TS: Did we have developmental courses at Tennessee at that time?

NW: No. My freshman year, I'm taking English and the instructor says, "Any error one through thirteen in *Harbrace College Handbook* [by John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten, published by Harcourt Brace, 5th edition 1962] was an automatic F. I had seven straight Fs on my papers. I took one of them to Coach Rohe. I said, "Hey, I wrote a paper." He said, "Let me look at it." He checks it. I got an F. He goes, "You ought to go see Tom. He's the counselor over there. He can help you." I took it and gave it to you. You made the changes. I turned it in and got another F. I had 13 straight Fs on my themes. I somehow passed with a D, but I really struggled the first couple of years. I made sure I didn't take anything that was really hard because I wasn't sure for two years that I was going to make it, but I wound up figuring it all out, and it wound up being okay.

TS: I would think that the athletic department would have some experience with struggling students from some of the football players they brought in.

NW: I had a tutor. She was tough. I guess it's just the way it was. I'm grateful I made it through though.

TS: So I didn't help you one iota. English was obviously a problem. What about other subjects? You majored in physical education.

NW: I tried everything. I tried to major in science and accounting, and nothing worked. It was like dominoes. I wound up majoring in physical education. At

the end, Coach Rohe called me in and said, "Thad Talley is the head track and cross country coach at Brevard. He wants to come back to Tennessee for graduate work [and as assistant track coach for the 1968-1969 school year]. I know the athletic director over there because we worked camp together over at Camp Carolina. Are you interested?" I'm going, "I always wanted to coach in college, but I figured that would take a while." But I said, "Sure." He says, "Go down there. We can work this out. It'll all work out." I went down there. Of course, the guy thought I was a basketball recruit. He and Thad worked it all out, and I wound up getting the job at Brevard from Coach Rohe. So Coach Rohe got me to Tennessee, helped me get an education, and then helped me get a job working at Brevard, which was really the perfect scenario for me. I am grateful for all that Coach Rohe has done for me.

TS: You must have done well in your classes if you graduated in four years, didn't you?

NW: I finally put it all together and graduated in four years, and I got my master of science [in 1968].

TS: So five years and you had a master's degree. Not bad for somebody who was going to have trouble making it through high school.

NW: I always look back and think that I was a tenured professor at Brevard, and I couldn't make it out of elementary school. It really is. I keep on wondering. I don't know how the hell that worked out.

TS: Before we get any further into Brevard, you were a fantastic runner at Tennessee. Why don't you talk about that? In 1965 you were fourth in the SEC outdoor meet in 1:52.8. That would have been your sophomore year.

NW: I anchored the mile relay at the SEC Outdoor Championships my freshman year and was second Indoor in the 600 yard my sophomore year.

TS: Tennessee was second, fourth, and fifth in 1965 [Rocky Soderberg came in second in 1:52.4 and John Nichols was fifth in 1:53.4]. In the 1966 SEC indoors you were second in the 600 yard, first in the 2 mile relay and then got hurt, I guess. Then in the 1967 indoors you were third in the 880 with a 155.8. That's not quite as well as you did earlier.

NW: No, I was coming off that injury junior year and questioning if I even wanted to run.

TS: In the 1967 SEC outdoors meeting you were second behind Larry Kelly's SEC record 1:48.5, and you had a 151.4. That's pretty good.

NW: Yes and we won the 2 mile relay indoors again in 67. I think the biggest disappointment in all that was I never could adapt to the distances. I was never a distance person.

TS: I didn't see you listed on the cross country team.

NW: Even jogging out to Cherokee Boulevard killed me. Coach used to use me as intervals. I would never even finish in time. He would just wait for me and tell everybody to go.

TS: You were really a 400-meter, 800-meter guy.

NW: Yes, I was really limited to very much that area. When I was running in high school, we never ever ran more than three miles. I remember one time he asked us to do three and a half. We told him we'd quit. So when Coach Rohe sent me the workouts for the summer, eight, ten, twelve mile stuff, I'm going, "Can't be me." So I upped my mileage to five. When I got to Tennessee, the very first day he goes, "Everybody get in the van. We're taking you out to the airport."

TS: Fourteen miles.

NW: Someone goes, "How far is that?" They go, "Fourteen miles." No way. I went up to Coach Rohe and said, "I can't run that far." He goes, "Witek, I'll drop you off at eight miles." I go, "Eight miles?" It seemed like I ran for days, and my stomach started cramping up. I had diarrhea, so I stopped at a gas station. I must've been in there an hour, came back out, and had no idea where I was. So I started hitch hiking. The first car that came by was Coach Rohe. He goes, "What am I going to do with you?" Because I was not used to it, and I was upping my mileage, I wound up getting a stress fracture and missed all of the cross country and indoor season.

I think that in a different way, I wish we could have maybe adjusted the distance because I realize after coaching for so many years how important that background is. But it was not the background I needed for ten to twelve miles. I would have been better off down to five or six miles with a little bit quicker pace or whatever. But part of it was my fault for not doing what I was really supposed to do. I'm not blaming anybody for that. My career, I felt like it was okay. I think the best benefit I had was the indoor meets that we would go to because we had one of the best two-mile relay teams. The memories I have of running in Boston and New York and Philadelphia are probably things I remember the most.

TS: I remember doing the run from the airport a couple of times.

NW: I've always had a hard time. My pulse rate is very high. I think that when I go out to run, my pulse shoots up really quickly into that oxygen debt, whereas other people are just maintaining that nice equilibrium. But then you put me into a 400 meter race, because I ran in the four by four in the SEC championships all the time [and was on the winning mile relay team in 1967], so I had the speed. It was that distance background that would kill me.

TS: Sure, but you made it through.

NW: I made it.

TS: Let's go on to Brevard. You made a career there and were a fabulous coach for cross country and track.

NW: It was a perfect place to be. Our teams, especially in my later years, were as good as any major university. One year we were 106 and 3, and all those were against major universities except for the nationals. We won four straight National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) cross country championships. Twice we won the North Carolina state championships, beating Carolina, Duke, Wake Forest, NC State, and all other major schools. We were a junior college running against the senior kids, and we got second at Furman that year. The only team that beat us at Furman was Florida State, and the only reason they beat us was their number one runner was one of my former All Americans who had transferred there.

So the teams that we had at the very end were unbelievable. I've had three individual national cross country champions, two national decathlon champions, and a national marathon champion. I coached the first African American to run the four-minute mile. I've had two Olympians. Really just everything that you can think of. We were a national powerhouse for junior colleges. There was no doubt about it.

TS: I think I went to Brevard once, maybe back about the spring of 1968 when Thad Talley was still there. It's a beautiful location.

NW: It really is. It's a great place to live, work, raise a family and train.

TS: I guess a good place to recruit to. Did you do much recruiting or were these local kids?

NW: No, very few local kids. What we had going for us was, number one, probably the best training area that you could possibly ask for. Keith [Alan] Brantly [1986 graduate of the University of Florida; 28th in the marathon at the 1996

Olympic Games] and some of the Olympians would come during the summer during the Olympic years and train in the mountains.

TS: Because of the elevation? How high is it?

NW: It goes on the parkway up to about 6,000 feet. It's not the altitude so much but the constant hills. Our kids were so strong. It was really hard to tire those guys out. I think the beautiful training area was one of the things [that helped recruiting]. Two, it was a junior college. We had very high academic standards because we had automatic transferability to all of the state schools, Duke, Carolina, and all. If you graduated from Brevard, you had a chance to get in there. So what we convinced people was that you could come to Brevard for two years, make an All American right off the bat because of how good you were, and then after two years, transfer to that really big school that you think you may want to go to with a lot better scholarship. So a good example of that was Ronnie Treadway. He ran 9.08 in high school in Florida. He came to Brevard, and when he left, he went down to Florida State. But there were all these kids that major universities were after, but they just loved what we had, and knew they could always go back. So they made a name for themselves. It was a perfect scenario.

TS: Brevard would have been a good place for you right out of high school, I bet.

NW: Probably so, but I hate to even say this. I probably would not have gone to junior college because up north, the junior colleges have really a very negative [reputation]. I was a poor student, and I needed to have gone there obviously. I think there were only two conferences at that time in the United States that were for church-related schools. Everybody else was community college with open-door admissions and all that.

TS: Brevard is church-affiliated?

NW: It's Methodist.

TS: Did you have scholarship money?

NW: We had two scholarships.

TS: Can't stretch that too far.

NW: No. It took me a while to figure out how to spread it out. My goal was to win a national championship at Brevard, and we were the very first team at Brevard to actually win a national championship in any sport.

TS: That was the marathon?

NW: That was the marathon that year [1982], and then we won four straight National Junior College Athletic Association cross country championships [1982-1985], but the two years prior to that we were second, and we technically could've won both of those with a little bit of luck. The problem was I was giving too much money to track. As we got better, I didn't give that pole vaulter anything. I gave it to another distance runner. At the end we were pretty much a distance school. You couldn't do everything with two scholarships.

TS: I wouldn't think so. You were head track coach from 1968 to 1986. Why did you stop coaching in 1986?

NW: I would've stopped coaching in 1982. My fault, if I look back at my career, is I put way too much pressure on myself when I came to Brevard. This is probably a fault of Tennessee, because they were so good. I wanted to be like Tennessee, and my goal was to win a national championship. But come on, I'm at Brevard with two scholarships, a junior college. What is the chance of any sport winning a national championship? But I was obsessed with winning a national championship. So when it was 1980, and we got second, I'm going, "I'm never going to win this thing."

TS: This is in cross country?

NW: Yes. In 1981 we had a good shot at it again, but didn't get it. We got second again. I thought, "I can't do this." Then we won the NJCAA marathon. I had the kids. I knew I had the kids then.

TS: I didn't even know there was a national championship in the marathon. Is this similar to a cross country team?

NW: You can have as many people as you want to run, except they count the first three. My kids came to me after the 1981 track year. They were coming back in 1982. Three of them came in my office and said, "Coach, we've got a proposition for you." I asked, "What is it?" "We want to run the marathon." I'm going, "No." "Why not?" I said, "You guys are going to get burned out. I can't afford it. I know we can win the national cross country." They go, "We promise, coach. We want to do it." I said, "Here's the deal. You either run together all three, or you drop out. That's the deal," because two of them were marathoners. Mikal Peveto was a marathoner. Hutch [Gerald Hutchinson] was in the army. He had been running the marathon, but Jim Hickey, the farthest he ever ran was ten miles. I said, "If Jim doesn't have someone to be with, he's going to drop out, and then what's the use?" They said, "Coach, we promise."

TS: Won't leave Hickey?

NW: Right. So at the 15-mile mark, we had three of the top four. Everybody around was going, "Coach. You've got the national championship. You've finally got your national championship," because they knew how much I wanted it. I'm going, "It's a long time yet. There's still a lot of race left." At the 20-mile mark, here comes a guy from Southwestern Michigan College, and he had about a 220-yard lead on Gerald Hutchison, one of my runners, followed by Mikal Peveto. Behind him was Jim Hickey, and you could tell Jim was faltering. Everybody around goes, "You got three guys in the top four. This is your national championship."

I'm looking at my guys, and here comes Hutchinson. I said, "Pull over." He goes, "What?" I said, "Pull over. You guys are done." Everybody is stunned. You can hear them in the background. "He's got this national championship. He's pulling his kids off." Peveto comes up and goes, "What's the matter?" Hutch goes, "He wants us to pull over." He goes, "Why?" "We're not running together." "Okay. We will." Here comes Hickey, and they literally waited for him. They all took off again, and I said, "Okay, that's the deal." At the 23-mile mark I drove up to them, and they were all running together with the SW Michigan guy ahead maybe 300 yards, and they go, "Coach, we got a proposition for you."

TS: They're able to talk after 23 miles?

NW: Yes, because they were ...

TS: They were jogging.

NW: They were jogging for Hickey in a way, and I said, "What is it?" "We talked it over, and Peveto thinks he can catch that guy." I said, "Great, but that doesn't mean that Hickey can keep up." Hutchinson says, "Coach, I'll stay with Jim Hickey." Hutchinson was in the service in the Army. I said, "Is that fine with you?" He said, "That's no problem." I said, "Okay, go for it." Peveto won the nationals [in 2:27.15]. A guy from Southwest [Armando Graza] got second [in 2:27.34], and we won our first national championship.

TS: So you had first, third, and fourth [with Hutchinson and Hickey finishing together in 2:28.39]?

NW: Yes.

TS: Hickey did pretty good, but he wouldn't if they hadn't waited?

NW: Yes, he wouldn't have made it.

TS: How about that? Where was the meet? Where did they hold it?

NW: Dowagiac, Michigan [home of Southwestern Michigan College] in June.

TS: If you're going to run a marathon in June, I guess Michigan is as good a place as any.

NW: Yes, it was pretty nice. It was pretty decent.

TS: After that you said, "Okay, let's win in cross country?"

NW: Yes, we won the national cross country championship in November of 1982. Then, after that meet was over, I went to the president's office. He goes, "Congratulations. You did great!" I said, "Thanks, I don't want to do this anymore." He goes, "Why?" I said, "My goal was to win the national championship. I won. I don't want to do it anymore." He said, "You can't be serious." I said, "I don't want to do it anymore." He said, "What if we got you an assistant, and he can do the women and you can do the distances?" I said, "Okay," and we hired a guy who became my assistant. Then in 1983 we won again, and I went to see the president. He goes, "You've got to stay one or two more years." In 1984 we won it again. I went to see the president, and he said, "Norm, I don't know what to tell you, but if you really want to get out, stay one more year, and I'll get you out." I said, "Are you sure of this?" He goes, "I'm positive."

We won it in 1985. Wouldn't you know? The president left. So, a new president is in there. I go into him. (I just read a letter from him as I was looking through my scrapbook). I told him, "I'm not going to coach anymore." He goes, "What? You just won a national championship." I said, "I don't want to do it anymore. I was promised by the other president that I don't have to do this anymore." He goes, "I've got to be the most stupid president in the world to allow you to leave, but if that's what he allowed you to do, then that's fine if that's what you want." I said, "That's what I want," so I got out of it.

TS: So you just accomplished your goal, and that was it.

NW: Yes.

TS: Did you learn anything from your own experience of not being a good cross country runner that helped you be a good cross country coach?

NW: I wish I could say I did, but I'm not sure why I was such a successful coach in cross country and yet I couldn't run it. I guess just because you can't do it doesn't mean that I didn't want to. I think my physical ability just wasn't there to run distances, no more than you can take a distance person and make him a great half miler or quarter miler. But with regard to distance background, I made sure of a couple things. Number one, I always recruited kids with background. Those kids who were half milers and such—and I've had 4:12 milers I wouldn't even recruit. They would want to come. I'd go, "You're going to have to up your mileage, and you're going to have to do hill training." If they said they couldn't do that, I would say, "This isn't really the place for you." I recruited kids that had like 5,000-meter marks, someone who had run some road races and a 5K and five miles. Those kids who came were basically distance-oriented kinds of kids, and those hills were just so much more strength for them. They could handle that.

What we developed was that sophomores would automatically take care of the freshmen. We ran in a very different environment. We grouped together. That was our strategy because we were so young. When we would go to a meet, I would say, "You all are going to be together. I don't care how far other people are ahead." I wanted these freshmen to realize how it was going to be because they in turn the following year were going to take over for the next group of freshmen. So we ran a lot of our races in a pack, and those freshmen didn't have to worry about it. "All you do is stay with that guy. They'll tell you when to make the moves and everything else."

TS: Were your workouts essentially what the cross country team at Tennessee was doing?

NW: Not at all, very different. But in all fairness, training methods have changed a lot. It's not to say that what we did at Tennessee was wrong. It was what people did back then. But that would never work with the kids I had. They didn't have the junior and senior backgrounds to be handling that volume of training. The workouts we had were hard, but they were all training in the mountains, so they didn't even realize how hard the workouts were to begin with.

TS: Any mentors that you followed other than Coach Rohe that maybe you learned different techniques or different types of workouts from?

NW: Yes, I don't know if you remember Bill Squires. He was the coach for the Greater Boston Track Club. He coached Randy Thomas and athletes like that. Anyway, I had a running camp, and we can talk about that later, but he was there at one of our camps. He was rooming with me, and I said, "Would you mind listening to what I do, and tell me what you think of my program?" He

goes, "Sure." We stayed up until 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock. He went over it and goes, "The only thing I actually see that I don't necessarily agree with is that there's too much rest in between your intervals. Your body conditions itself to rest, and if you allow your team to have these intervals in between where they're jogging or walking or whatever they're doing, your body adjusts to that. So in a race, they're used to having a break. Your body is going, 'Where is my break?' 'You don't get any today.' That's not going to work." He showed me what we call tempo surge workouts that were just grueling. People cried during them. They simulated what you would be doing in a race.

TS: Explain that.

NW: I did a lot of pulse training. I never asked the kids how they felt. I never asked them if they were ready to go. I would always check their pulse rates. When you do tempo running, the tempo had to be over 160 to about 180 or 190. When you got into a rest, it was always about 120. So when you get through with a surge workout, which was at that 160, you started off with a 15-minute surge, 15 tempo, 15 surge, 15 tempo ...

TS: You're talking about heart rates?

NW: Heart rates. When they would be running, I would spot-check them. Pulse check. Real quick. Six seconds. "Add a zero—160, 170. Fine. Stay on that pace right there." When they got through that 15-minute surge, they would go into 15 minutes of tempo. This is where so many people get messed up because they take too much rest.

TS: My watch can tell what my heart rate is.

NW: Back then they didn't have that kind of technology. When they did the tempo, they would go and run around. "How much time do we go?" We didn't time it. We just stopped and pulse checked: "130, that's great. Move a little bit longer. Okay, pulse check; 120, get ready, go." They would take off.

TS: I guess at 120 they start back up.

NW: Right because the capillary system has to be developed. If you run into a 90 or 100, you have to run from 90 to 120 with nothing happening. You're wasting good energy to build up the capillary system. If you're at 120, you're going right into a workload. We did everything on our pulses. If we did eight 800s, how fast would you run those? Everybody is different. Let us say we have Alphonse Swai. He was one of our Tanzanians. He won the NJCAA national cross country championship [in 1983 with a time of 24:30.08 over a course in Hutchinson, Kansas]. Does he run the same 800 meters as the five-minute

walk-on guy? No. You don't know what that time is. It's eight times 800 at over 160 to 180. "Okay, ready, go." They run around a lap.

TS: You're checking their pulse?

NW: Up here, right here where you've got a big beat. Here comes Alphonse. He comes across the line. 2:14 for 800 meter. "Pulse check: 170." "Fine. That's where you need to be." Joe Walk-on: he's coming in at 2:30 or 2:31. You'd probably yell and scream at him. But you don't. "Pulse check: 160, 170." That's where you're supposed to be. When that pulse gets to 120, everybody on the line. Everything we did we did on that pulse check.

TS: The first interval, they start out together, but after that, they start when their pulse gets down to 120?

NW: Right and if they run at that level, all of them will come very close to being the exact same time.

TS: That's a little bit of science applied to the training. How high would their heart rate go?

NW: Well, if it'd go like 200, I'd have to tell them to slow down. You're not running. We did a 12-minute surge, and they were supposed to run 9:30 pace. Then there was a 12-minute tempo, and they were supposed to run at 120 [heart rate], and the next 12 minutes they had to go at 9:30 pace. That was the goal. Alphonse Swai came through in 8:52 at the two-mile, so you can see how good he was, and the rest of the people are like, "I can't get you guys. We're too far back there." It was just a lot different. It was a better way to deal with it.

TS: That's interesting. Your two scholarships when you were winning those cross country championships were going to the distance runners, I gather. And the rest of the track team, did you just do what you could with them?

NW: Yes. We were relying pretty much on all of our distance people. We finished fourth in the nation indoors with all of our distance people.

TS: I remember one time it seems like Georgetown would have a great two-mile relay team, and that would be about the essence of their track program.

NW: You've got to be good at something.

TS: Exactly. Okay. Is this when you become dean of students?

NW: Yes. I got out and was athletic director and division chair and still taught my classes. Then the new president brought in a new academic dean, and he and I

became really, really good friends. I was a division chair, and he was single. He would come to our house like once a week, bring a bottle of wine, sit down, and talk. He goes, "What do you want to do with your life, Witek?" I'm going, "I'm fine doing what I do." He goes, "Seriously, what would you really want to do?" I said, "If I had my way, I would straighten out the student body."

He asks, "What do you mean?" I said, "Do you know how much alcoholism is on this campus? We have a policy where you can't drink. There's no one even 21, so you have violations like crazy, destruction of the dorms, and everything is just pathetic. I would straighten that whole thing out." He goes, "How?" I told him I'd redo the whole handbook, and I'd give them counseling, and I'd give them points. If they too many points, they'd be out of here. He goes, "Okay."

TS: Demerits?

NW: Yes, kind of like demerits. Somewhere in that semester they called up and said, "The president wants to see you." "Oh, man!" You never know what they have come up with. Anyways, I walked in, and the president and academic dean were there. I sat down, and they looked at me and said, "How would you like to be our dean of students?" "You're kidding." He said, "We love your ideas. The dean is the developmental person for students. He loves what you're doing. So write it up and do a couple workshops with it and stuff like that." I said, "Yes, but I have tenure. Will I keep my tenure?" He said, "No, I can't guarantee you tenure." I said, "There's no way I'm taking a dean of students job without tenure." He said, "How about if we guarantee you that you'll have your tenure after being dean of students." I said, "Okay. If that's what it is, can you put that in writing?"

He said, "If that's what your belief in me is for then you're the wrong person." I said, "I'm not worried about you. I'm worried about the next person that comes in here and decides that there's no letter, and he gets rid of me." That's exactly what happened too because once he left, the new president came in, and I knew I couldn't work with him. He called me in and said, "I hate to tell you this, but you've got to find yourself a new job. I don't want you as dean of students anymore." I said, "That's fine. I realize we can't work together, but I'm not going anywhere." "What do you mean you're not going anywhere?" "You need to look in that file over there. There's a letter that guarantees I get my tenure back." He didn't like that at all. Then I went back into physical education.

TS: I was thinking most of our administrators are still tenured but not as an administrator. They're still tenured in their academic discipline.

NW: They didn't see it that way.

TS: Tennessee just fired their chancellor, but she's tenured in whatever field she's in.

NW: They get really particular when you start putting tenure on a position.

TS: She keeps the same salary for four years or something like that.

NW: Brevard won't do that.

TS: So you go back to full-time teaching at this point?

NW: Right. Then we had become a four-year school in the early 1990s. It needed to be. They needed to get away from the junior college system. The new president called me in and said that, "We are very interested in starting an education program, and we want you to head up our licensure program for physical education." I said, "Yes, I'll do that." So I developed the current plan of courses. Since I'm the only one who was licensed in my field, I developed the curriculum according to state guidelines and taught the classes I loved to teach.

TS: What does licensure mean in physical education? Who licenses?

NW: The State of North Carolina to offer the education program. They sent over representatives and looked at your program to make sure that it met the standards and criteria that they had. I also dealt with the student teachers of physical education. I also supervised the student teachers and monitored the supervising teachers in the school system. Somewhere in there I was interim coach four different times. We lost coaches like crazy, and they'd ask me to be the coach again.

TS: You went back to coaching cross country or the whole track team?

NW: Twice I had to do track in March.

TS: In March?

NW: Yes, I did that twice. Then twice, I took over for a full year as a supervisor or mentor to people to make sure the program was headed in the right direction.

TS: Talk about the camps that you run.

NW: I began camp with a coach from Florida in 1972. He and I parted ways in 1990 and I started the Brevard Distance Runners Camp in 1991. We rent the college facilities. The college has nothing to do with the camp whatsoever. We started

off with sixty-seven people that year, and we now have over twelve hundred campers over the three weeks—all middle and high school runners. We have 115 staff people and 120 to 150 coaches that come in. So we have about fifteen hundred people during those three weeks. It's one of the largest running camps in the United States.

TS: I see you have them in July this year. That's right before they're going to be starting their school year and the beginning of cross country. Are you giving them a head start on their cross country programs in high school?

NW: Right. We're one of the few camps that do a lot of what we call "learn by doing and challenge courses" where groups work together and solve challenges, such as "missing boards" or the "trust fall." That's what I actually developed when I was dean of students. We took all of our freshmen to a camp and did those things. I actually presented a publication on it at a workshop on the Freshman Experience. So we do that with our running camp, and in our brochure you can see some of the drills that they might be doing there.

TS: Judging by the brochure, they seem to be doing some other things too. They're out in the pool. They're out near a waterfall.

NW: We keep them busy.

TS: They're probably having a great time.

NW: We make sure they have a great time.

TS: A one week camp for \$625? That's not too bad if you are providing room and board.

NW: No. Not for six days. We're one of the few camps that are for six days. We are sponsored by Adidas and that's where Mikal Peveto comes in.

TS: Talk about that.

NW: He ran for me. He's the national marathon champion. He went on to become the senior product manager worldwide for Adidas Running in Germany. When he got there, I was sponsored by Nike. He called me up and said, "How would you like to be sponsored by Adidas?" I said, "Yes." He asked, "What do you want?" So I told him a pair of shoes for each of my staff members, two hundred shirts, whatever it is. He goes, "Okay, you got it." He wound up giving all that stuff and prizes for the campers, and so over the years two of my kids have worked for Adidas. He got them internships and they managed to find careers with Adidas. Peveto has worked for or consulted for every major shoe

company in the world. His last position was Senior Director Future Innovation Roadmap for Global Running in Portland, Oregon.

TS: Okay. What's special about *the Brevard* shoe?

NW: In the mid 90's, Peveto came to camp with his six vice presidents. He said, "Each year we do a retreat. Some years we go to Paris or to London. We're going to come to Brevard this year. We're going to bring one hundred pairs of shoes, and we're going to have kids try all these on. We're going to develop the next big product for Adidas." So he spent three weeks during our camp time. They would spend days on their retreat and everything else. When they went back to Germany, they said, "We're going to name this shoe. Why don't we name it *the Brevard* after our experience?" Everybody goes, "That's a great idea." They did. *The Brevard* shoe was one of their top selling shoes for almost 10 years in America. Then Peveto left, and one lady out of those six vice presidents was the only one left. She wanted to take *the Brevard* shoe and totally redevelop it and remarket it. She call me and said "I'd like to name it *the Witek* after the experiences that you've had with running and the career of helping so many different people. It's a women's shoe, and it's going to be available all through Europe." She said, "We'd like to do that. Is there a problem with that?" I said, "No, not from my standpoint," and so I am the only nonprofessional athlete to have a shoe named after him by a major shoe company.

TS: Maybe you should receive a royalty.

NW: No, you can't, not for a *Witek* because *the Witek* itself cannot be trademarked. There are too many Witek that would protest. Anyways, we went to see my son who was working in Germany at the time, and we went into a store. I've got *Witek* shoes, but they're the prototype, and I wanted the German box. So we went into a department store in Germany and called a salesperson over. My daughter-in-law is German, so she said to the guy that we'd like to look at this shoe. He brought the shoe down, and she goes, "How do you say that shoe?" He goes, "That's the "vee-tek" shoe." She goes, "Do you know who that shoe is named after? It's named after this guy." He responds, "If it's named after him, why is he trying to buy a pair?" She says, "Because he doesn't have a German box, and he wants the German box that has *Witek* on it. Show him your driver's license." I showed him my driver's license. I don't think he bought it. I think UT did something on *the Witek* shoe back in their alumni magazine [University of Tennessee *Accolades*, October 15, 2015].

TS: So your ancestors were from Germany?

NW: No. They were from Poland.

TS: In Poland, it would've been pronounced "wit-ek"?

NW: No, it was "vee-tek."

TS: So the salesperson was pronouncing the way it was ..

NW: The way it's supposed to be pronounced.

TS: ... before they got to America, and nobody could pronounce "vee-tek"?

NW: Right.

TS: I was just looking at your senior staff, and there's a lot of Witeks: Kyle and Danielle, Larry, Berr and Sabine, Steven, Wayne, and Wendi.

NW: We added a couple more, too. Everybody in the family has gotten involved with it. My daughter really wants to run it. I'm trying to give more of the responsibilities to the kids, and so they're taking over a little bit.

TS: And you're incorporated?

NW: Yes. It's a family owned corporation. My wife and I are the shareholders.

TS: There are a lot of females in the brochure pictures. Is this for women?

NW: It's for men and women. We have basically an equal number.

TS: You won some awards, including the National Junior College Athletic Association Track & Field Coaches Hall of Fame in 1989.

NW: I was also elected to the Brevard College Hall of Fame [2004], and to the Lyons Township High School Hall of Fame in 2008. That Hall of Fame is not an athletic hall of fame. It's a hall of fame for anybody who might be in medicine or an astronaut. There are very few athletes or coaches in there, and so I really felt like that was an honor. In 2017, I received the Distinguished Professor Award from Brevard College, another honor that was humbling to me.

TS: It would be nice if those nuns were still around who didn't think you would amount to much.

NW: If I could find them. They seemed to be 90 years old when I was in elementary school. All I remember is getting hit every day during Lent. I had a paper route, and I couldn't go to church. When I got to school, she said, "All those

who didn't go to mass, come up here." You had to put your hand out there, and they would whack it with the ruler. I told my parents, "It's not my fault." But they replied, "We can't do anything." This went on for forty days.

TS: Catholic churches have five or six masses a weekend, don't they? You couldn't find one you could go to?

NW: These were every morning during Lent. You had to go to church, but with my paper route, there was no way. I was lucky to make it to school on time. Everybody used to laugh because even before she would say "anybody," I would just start walking up there.

TS: A paper route ought to be a good excuse.

NW: You would think. It wasn't.

TS: Learning worthwhile skills.

NW: Yes. Tough life.

TS: I learned a lot from carrying papers. It was all my brother's fault. He actually got the route and he had me out there with him. We were up at 4:30 every morning carrying papers.

NW: Ours was like 6:00, I think, to get them delivered. You only had four streets. They were 4 blocks long on both sides. We had the *Chicago Tribune* and *Sun-Times*. I think that what really helped me with my track was when I got on my bike and put the papers on. As fast as you could go, you would peddle that bike and toss those papers. That was like a morning workout when you think about somebody going out and getting two or three miles. It probably helped quite a bit.

TS: Absolutely. For sure. On our old paper route, we would cover at least four or five miles, I guess. We would finish about 6:00 o'clock in the morning.

NW: I got \$12 for the month, I think.

TS: Some of the Rohe era group went over to Brevard for your retirement in July 2015, I think.

NW: Yes, I probably would have stayed maybe a little longer, but they were really putting a lot of pressure on me to coach, and I didn't want to do it anymore. The kids were not the same. The college wasn't putting any money into it. My budget was [so small that] I had to fund raise to even pay for trips. I just told them, "I'll be real honest with you. I've done everything I can for you. Don't

call me anymore." The only way for me to drop that was to just stop everything and walk away, with which I have no problem.

TS: But you had forty-seven years in.

NW: The longest any faculty member has ever stayed there.

TS: I was going to say, I think some folks that went to your retirement said that the tributes that people gave you sounded like they were talking about Coach Rohe.

NW: Yes, it is amazing. My daughter did all the work [organizing the event]. She said, "You want to know who wants to speak?" I said, "Yes, I would." She named the people who were going to speak. One guy, I didn't even know who he was. It was one of my very first years. I'm going, "There's no telling what's going to happen with this." That guy got up there, and I had tears in my eyes of how he expressed himself of what I did for him and his life. It shows you the impact that you can have on people. I never realized it. But, yes, it was a great retirement ceremony. Reggie McAfee is writing a book on becoming the first African American to run a four-minute mile. He can't figure out how he got to Brevard.

TS: He can't figure it out? He doesn't remember?

NW: No. Connie Smith was at Eastern Kentucky. He left Morton High School to become the coach at Eastern Kentucky. After my second year at Brevard, I ran into him. We were running against his kids, and he came up and said, "I don't know if you remember me. I'm the coach at Morton High School. I was the one who gave your name to Coach Rohe." I said, "Oh, okay." We became friends. We used to run into him four or five times. Anyways, he got the job as an assistant to Coach Rohe [in 1969]. He had recruited Lennox Stewart and Reggie McAfee.

They were supposed to go to Eastern Kentucky, but somehow, and we still can't figure it out because Coach Rohe doesn't even know, but we thought they signed with Eastern Kentucky and UT couldn't take him because of NCAA recruiting rules. You had to sit out a year, so I guess that Connie Smith talked to Coach Rohe and said, "Send them to Brevard. You'll get him back after a couple of years." So both of those guys came to Brevard.

Lennox Stewart was national record holder in the 800 meters for Trinidad and Tobago, and then went to the University of North Carolina and ran in the 1972 Olympics for Trinidad and Tobago [and also finished 4th in the 800 meters at the 1971 Pan American Games. His lifetime best in 1972 was 1:47.0].

Reggie McAfee was in *Sports Illustrated* in the "Faces in the Crowd" section for running a 4:08 and a 1:52.5 [for Courter Technical High School of Cincinnati] at an Ohio Class AA state meet [in 1969]. He came to Brevard.

I said to Reggie, "Do you remember our first meeting?" He said, "No." I said, "I picked you up at the bus station in Cincinnati, Ohio. We were driving to Brevard." I was trying to talk to him, and he was real quiet. I was driving, and I could see him looking at me. When I looked at him, he would look out the window. I did this three or four times. I said, "You have any questions?" He said, "Yes, I have a couple questions. How old are you [laughs]?" I said, "22." He goes, "Do you know anything?" It really bothered me that he said that, but I look at what I knew then and what I knew at the end of my career. I could have got him down to 3:55, 3:56, seriously.

Anyways, he came to Brevard, and he struggled. He got hurt his freshman year. He and I did not see eye to eye. His parents did not want him to come south. So we really would clash a lot. I'd say, "You're doing four miles today." He goes, "Why?" I said, "Because it's the best thing for you to do." Lennox Stewart was a really good friend and roommate, and he loved me. He would always tell Reggie, "He's doing fine." Anyways, he wanted me to pay for his trip home one day. I said, "I can't pay for your trip." He said, "If I leave, I'm not coming back." "I can't do anything for you. It's against the rules." Somebody at the college lent him the money, and he went home. He stayed for a couple days, and he came back. He finished sixth at the nationals and wouldn't pick up his medal. He said, "I don't want it. It's not any good."

TS: Because it was only sixth?

NW: Yes, 6th place. At the end of the year, we met with all of our athletes. We sat down, and I said, "I guess this means goodbye." He goes, "What do you mean?" I said, "You're going to transfer." He says, "Coach, I'll be honest with you. I thought about it, but you know what? It wouldn't be fair. I haven't proven anything to you. I'm going to prove to you that I am the best African American kid you've ever seen," and he did. He won the [fall 1970] NJCAA national cross country championship [in 20:30.8 over a rain-soaked 4.179 mile course in Vincennes, Indiana]. [In spring 1971] he set the NJCAA national record in the mile [4:04.4] and national record in the two mile [9:00.5]. The kicker was I had Lennox Stewart in my office before the national track meet and I said, "I'd like to have Reggie run the mile and two mile at nationals."

He goes, "He's not going to do it." "What do you mean?" I said. "He knows you're going to ask him that. He's doing only one event." I said, "I know he can win two easy." I call him in the office, and I said, "I've got you down for the mile." He goes, "What about two mile?" "That's way too hard of a double.

Nobody can run a double like that." "Put me down." He ended up winning those two easily. We were invited to the Martin Luther King International Freedom Games Miracle Mile [May 16, 1971] against Marty Liquori, Jim Ryun, Byron Dice and Denis Fikes. So he ran a four-minute mile, and this is really the bad part.

TS: This is in Philadelphia?

NW: This is in Philadelphia, and it was all about getting an African American to run the four-minute mile. That was the whole point. Before the race, some guy came up to us and said, "We're going to do an interview with you if he breaks the four-minute mile." I said, "Okay, no problem." The race went on, and as Ryun and Liquori crossed the line [in 3:54.6], people mobbed the finish line. Reggie McAfee had to slow down to get around everybody. His time was 4:00.0! He would have broken it without everyone in the way!

TS: Oh my goodness.

NW: That was heartbreaking. Such a heartbreaking thing! Reggie wanted to be a pharmacist. Everybody in the nation wanted him [to transfer for his junior and senior years]. He ran four minutes. Come on. You're not going to get a better kid than that. So Oregon would call, UCLA, just everybody, and they would say, "We want Reggie McAfee." I said, "He wants to be a pharmacist." "I don't have pharmacy. How about PE?" "Nope." When I talked to Reggie I said, "What do you want to do?" "I want to go to pharmacy. I don't want to talk to any of these coaches. You tell them whoever gets me in the pharmacy program is where I'm going to go." I said, "Okay."

Lennox Stewart signed with the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Cary Boshamer was one of our trustees. He built our gymnasium. He built the entire athletic facilities over at Chapel Hill, their baseball field and everything. He was a great person. We would sit there in a meeting, and he would go, "What do you guys need?" "We need a pool." We got a pool. "We need a gym." "I'll build a gym. What else do you guys need?"

TS: Add more scholarships.

NW: Yes [laughs]. We sat down and started talking, and he goes, "Your two kids that you've got, where are they going?" I said, "Lennox Stewart is already signed with Chapel Hill." He asks, "What about that other kid?" I said, "He wants to go to pharmacy school." He says, "What if I could get him in at Chapel Hill?" I said, "If you get him into Chapel Hill, he'll go to Chapel Hill." "Get me a phone." We got a phone, and he calls up and talks to the head of the pharmacy program. "I need a favor. I need a kid in your program." We got him in.

TS: How about that? Did he break the four-minute mile when he got Chapel Hill?

NW: Yes. [On April 21, 1973, he ran his first sub-four minute mile, coming in second to UNC teammate Tony Waldrop in 3:59.3 at the Big Four meet in Raleigh, North Carolina. A week later he ran the identical time in winning the mile at the Atlantic Coast Conference Championships. (He also had won the mile at the ACC outdoor meet in 1972 at 4:04.8). In June 1973 he ran 3:57.8 at the NCAA outdoor track and field championships, finishing 3rd behind 1972 Olympic 800-meter gold medalist Dave Wottle and teammate Tony Waldrop].

TS: At least for you he ran a 4:00.0.

NW: Yes, first African American to run a four minute mile. I didn't say he broke the four-minute mile. But when we sat down, and I said, "Okay, let's work on your goals," and he said, "I want to be the first African American to run the four-minute mile." I looked around and thought, "I'm 22 years-old. What the hell do I know?" To think that this guy was putting that kind of pressure on me, in a way, but believed that I knew enough about it, that scared the hell out of me to think that I could get somebody down [to Brevard] like that. It's amazing. But then the half-miler, Lennox Stewart, ran 148.8 to set the national junior college record [at the 1971 NJCAA outdoor track and field championships]. I had both of those guys at the same time. We dominated places. We inducted Reggie into the Brevard College Hall of Fame [in 2004]. In 1989, Reggie was the first athlete to be inducted into the National Junior College Athletic Association Track & Field Hall of Fame. Lennox was inducted into the Brevard College Athletic Hall of Fame in 2008.

TS: I would think that it was culture shock to go to the hills of western North Carolina for them.

NW: It was. We went to Montgomery, Alabama, and he set the record there. We stopped for gas, and nobody would come out to give us gas. Finally I went in and said, "Hey, we're waiting out here." He goes, "As long as you got those boys out there, we don't give gas." I'm going, "You've got to be kidding." I'm from the North where that wasn't even an issue. To think that that was an issue, that's unbelievable. They had a little bit of a culture shock. I'm anxious to see what his book will come out with. It is what it is.

TS: Should be interesting.

NW: Yes.

TS: I think we've pretty well covered your career and the influences on you. Any last thoughts?

NW: No. I am very appreciative of certainly what Tennessee has done for me and Coach Rohe. I was telling [my wife] Nancy, "I can't imagine my life going any better than the way it's gone." Everything I've done and touched has really turned out to be very good.

TS: Looks like you've got a big family: three sons, one daughter, and three grandchildren.

NW: Yes, we have four grandchildren. Kyle and Danielle just had a cute little girl. Danielle is a fashion designer for Reebok. She met with Beyonce on sponsoring the bra that she developed. This coming weekend, she's doing some kind of interview with *Vogue* magazine on her new development of the bra, and so we're going to go there and take care of the baby.

TS: Well, any half-milers on the way in your family?

NW: No. Our oldest son Steven was a high jumper. He was a basketball player, but never ran cross country. Our middle son Berry ran in middle school. Of course, he was a half-miler, had to be a half-miler, but then he went into soccer and played but didn't do anything after that. Our youngest son Kyle was a basketball player and played for High Point University. He was a guard. He wanted to get in shape, so he wanted to go out for cross country, and he found out how hard it was. He had asthma, too, so he really struggled. Then finally my daughter Wendi went out and, of course, she had to be a half-miler. It's amazing. That's what they put her in, and her team won and set the state record for the two-mile relay. But none of them really competed after that.

TS: Well, this is great.

NW: I really appreciate it. Probably spent more time talking than I should have.

TS: No. This is perfect.