

**INTERVIEW WITH WINSTON RUSSELL  
CONDUCTED BY TOM SCOTT  
SATURDAY, AUGUST 17, 2013  
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE**

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**TS:** We're talking to Winston Russell, the captain of the track team in 1964. Winston actually started at Tennessee Tech in the 1959-60 school year, and then transferred to Tennessee. So, tell what that was like to run at Tennessee in 1961.

**WR:** Actually, when I transferred, that was before Coach Rohe was there. Ralph Patterson, who was an assistant basketball coach, was the track coach. I had to sit out a year under the transfer rules.

**TS:** Oh, that's right.

**WR:** So, I sat out a year, and then I ran a year [1962] with Coach Patterson before Coach Rohe came. Then, I got two years. I was with Coach Rohe in 1963 and 1964.

**TS:** That's right—we have the picture of you when we won the championship!

**WR:** SEC, yes, in Kentucky. Great day!

**TS:** Okay, so you were actually five years then, because you sat out a year. That makes sense. I started at Tennessee as a freshman in the fall of 1961. I remember almost nothing about that year when I was a freshman. I guess we had track meets, I just don't remember much about them.

**WR:** You ran for Coach Patterson as well, then.

**TS:** Yes, I don't remember running for him. I do remember him being around. I don't remember ever learning anything from him.

**WR:** Well, we probably didn't learn anything very much, but I do know that we ran all our home meets inside Neyland Stadium. The track was only, I think, 360 yards around up there. That's back when it was just a horseshoe

stadium. They would come in every year and remove the bleachers at the North end zone, so we could still run around the track. We'd do the shot and discuss in there and long jump and did our workouts there and ran our track meets there.

**TS:** What was it like? Obviously, we didn't have much of a track program at that time, but we had some good guys from Oak Ridge [High School]. You were one of them.

**WR:** We had a number of guys. A lot of those guys, we were teammates in high school. We ran for Coach Ben Martin at Oak Ridge. A bunch of those guys like Herschel Bailey and David Burkhardt—they all came to UT, and I went to Tennessee Tech and ran a year. Then, I found out through Coach Patterson that if I were to transfer to UT and sit out a year, I could get a scholarship at UT and run, which I did. That put me back with a bunch of guys I grew up with.

**TS:** Were you living in the dormitory when the stadium was the dormitory?

**WR:** Yes, the track guys and basketball guys and baseball guys—I think we most of us lived in South Stadium, and the football people lived in East Stadium. We were separated there, and the training table and so forth was down under the stands.

**TS:** Yes, I remember eating at that training table.

**WR:** That was an experience!

**TS:** I guess I was in Burkhardt's or Bill Beall's room or somewhere on occasion when I guess we were waiting between classes and shooting the breeze. They weren't the greatest facilities in the world.

**WR:** No. We saw a lot of things change in the short time that we were there. We came through at a great time to see some super things happen.

**TS:** Yes, we were just fortunate that they got a good coach while we were there.

**WR:** Were we ever! I think, for a huge amount of us—that changed our lives. I'm not sure that some of us would have even stayed and made it through Tennessee had it not been for Coach Rohe.

**TS:** How much did you improve after Rohe came?

**WR:** By leaps and bounds! Before he came we pretty much did our own workout, and it wasn't much of a workout.

**TS:** Well, that's what I was saying. I don't remember being coached that whole year. I don't think it was much at all.

**WR:** Yes, you hit it right on. We were not coached anything like it was when Coach Rohe came. Of course, you remember Thad Talley. He came as a graduate student and helped Coach Rohe, and the program just took off from then. He did a tremendous job recruiting, and we saw what a great change that took place by the time we were juniors and seniors. That freshman group came in, I guess, at the end of my sophomore year [of eligibility].

**TS:** Right. Coach Rohe was hired at the end of the track season in 1962. I was at the end of my freshman year. Tell what it was like. I thought that the 1962-63 year was a great year for us because they needed us, but we had all these freshmen there [who were ineligible to compete on the varsity] who were really pushing us or pulling us on.

**WR:** I think that's what helped a lot of us to become a lot better than we thought we could be because to keep up with the freshmen and keep up with the workouts, we either had to do it or we would fall off to the side. I think we all stepped it up and tried to meet what we were asked to do. I remember before he came, we used to dress there in the stadium, and the track group always dressed in the South Stadium under the stands, which was for many, many years the visiting football team's locker room. We would dress there. When Coach Rohe came, we moved over under the East section, and that was our locker room, which was right next to the football locker room.

The only thing that separated us and the football group was Mickey O'Brien's training room. So, that's where we dressed for all those years. We worked out for a while in Neyland Stadium, and then we got to the point where we would go over to Evans Collins, and we would work out there and run our meets there as well. We didn't have a top-notch track on the campus at that time like they eventually had. We missed out on that part. At least, I did. But we would run at Evans Collins and then run over at the [Dean-Planter's] tobacco warehouse—which most of us will never forget. That was a great facility as well. We were fortunate to be able to have a place like that. Indoors, that just made our season!

**TS:** Did the sprinters have to jog over there to do the workouts?

**WR:** Oh, yes. I remember we would match up with all the distance guys. We would bundle up in the winter time, and we would take off, and we would jog through that part of Knoxville. That was back before they came in with a lot of that urban renewal. We would run right down the middle of the street, and grocery stores and traffic.

**TS:** It wasn't the most economically affluent part of Knoxville.

**WR:** No, it wasn't. I was glad to get through there, but the interesting thing was that I always remember that stood out for me was when you would go in the tobacco warehouse, of course, you had that smell, but you fellows who were distance runners, you would get in there and run. In the winter time, even though it was cold, real cold, inside, it blocked the wind. You guys would strip down to just shorts and your running tops, and I could remember watching all the steam rise off you guys' bodies between your interval workouts that Coach Rohe had you all doing. I remember those times. That was quite an experience.

**TS:** Yes, for the distance runners, it wasn't any big deal to be in there in cold weather because we didn't ever stop. I guess for the sprinters it was a little bit different story.

**WR:** Yes, and, of course, some of us sprinters—I guess, the first year Coach Rohe was there, we didn't have many upper classmen. So, he recruited some of us guys who were sprinters, hurdlers, and jumpers to run cross country. So, I was on that first cross country team [1962]. Talk about going through some challenging times! Those were times that I'll never forget, running down by the Sewage Treatment Plant on Neyland Drive, and running through the Ag campus there. It was quite an experience. That's when a lot of guys that came didn't last very long. They dropped out. Even some of our freshmen that came didn't last very long. The thing that jumps out to me about doing that cross country there—of course, we ran through all the Ag campus, and we did Death Valley and all that. Coach Rohe was always—you could hear him hollering, "What a day!" and, "Pick it up!" The sprinter guys who were trying to be distance runners—we were in the back of the pack. We finally figured out a way that we could cut across some of the Ag campus and cut out some of the workout.

**TS:** I didn't know that.

**WR:** Yes, a lot of people didn't know. We actually didn't think Coach Rohe knew it. We were running one day, and the next thing we know, we hear him say, "Pick it up! What a day!" We look around, and he had purchased or had someone loan him, remember, he had a motor scooter.

**TS:** Yes, a moped.

**WR:** He ran a moped through there, and he would follow us around the course then. So, that cut the short cuts out for us.

**TS:** I think I remember Herschel Bailey talking about riding in a truck from just about the start of the race to the end of the race one time in the Patterson era.

**WR:** Yes, we would do anything. Anything we could do to get to the finish of the workout.

**TS:** In 1962 we needed you [and other sprinters] to have the five people to place so that we had a team result in the SEC.

**WR:** I remember that, yes. It was rough.

**TS:** Do you think it helped you in your sprinting and jumping at all?

**WR:** I definitely do. It made me a lot stronger. You remember in indoors and outdoors from then on I did about seven events. I could just do one event, and step up to the next, and my recovery time was fantastic.

**TS:** What were the seven events you were doing?

**WR:** A lot of times I would do the high hurdles, I would do back then the intermediate hurdles, I would run a leg on the 4 x 110 yards relay, I would compete in the high jump, long jump, triple jump, and sometimes I would run a leg on the mile relay. That was a good day. You just had to warm up one time. It was great! I loved it.

**TS:** So, you were running seven events per meet.

**WR:** Correct.

**TS:** Wow! Of course, I guess I was doing three distance events—the mile, 880, and the two mile run.

**WR:** Yes, but your three distance events outnumbered all the distances I put in. We always looked up to all the guys who were distance runners. We just couldn't figure out how you guys did what you did.

**TS:** Now you were captain in 1964. Were you the captain in 1963 as well?

**WR:** I was captain in 1963, I think, in the spring. In 1964 I was the indoor and outdoor captain. That was the year we won the indoor championship and the outdoor championship. That was the first year that Tennessee had ever won. It was quite an experience. We had a great group. That was when that large group of freshmen [Coach Rohe's first recruiting class] were now sophomores. They carried a big part of the load for us.

**TS:** Yes. Well, what did you learn from Chuck Rohe?

**WR:** I learned that hard work pays off. You've got to keep working even though when the going gets tough, the tough get going, as he used to say. You learned to just keep going and put in the hours and things will tend to fall in place for you. I made some great friends, met a lot of people, and have a lot of great memories, memories that have lasted a lifetime.

**TS:** What do you think your greatest accomplishment was in track?

**WR:** That's a tough question—just being a part of the team and making it through those couple of years when Coach Rohe came and sticking it out was a great accomplishment for me. Of course, he was good in making sure that we went to class, and that we graduated, and that has paid off in dividends many times over.

**TS:** Did you graduate at the end of 1964?

**WR:** I graduated in the spring of 1964. You met people, and still rub elbows with people, that we've known each other now since back in the 1960s, from all over the country, so it was a lifetime deal.

**TS:** What did you do for a career after you graduated?

**WR:** I graduated in 1964, and in 1965 I went to graduate school and had an assistantship at UT, and taught physical education classes with Dr. [Ben] Plotnicki, who we all remember as a starter, and his son, Skip [who ran on the varsity track team in 1963]. Anyway, I was a graduate student, and then I was hired the next year, and I taught a year as a physical education instructor at Tennessee. Then, I had an offer from my hometown, which was Oak Ridge, and I went to Oak Ridge, and I stayed there. I coached and taught for 42 years. I retired 6 years ago, but I'm still coaching—with the football program right now. I got out of track 2 years ago. But this is my 48<sup>th</sup> year of coaching with the Oak Ridge School System. But the interesting thing is the things I learned at Tennessee under Coach Rohe and all the other people that came to help us—those things carried over till the last year that I was coaching [track]. Two years ago I was still using a lot of those things that we learned back in those days. I mean, they are still the things to do. People would always talk to us about our relays: "How do you do your handoff?" Those were things I learned under Coach Rohe. And some of the field events—the things have never changed. So, he was a guy that was up to date back in those days. Maybe he was ahead of his time, but those things that he taught us, you still find those today. A great experience!

**TS:** Anything else you want to add?

**WR: I think I'm fine. I'm just glad to be here with all these "young men" and good to see them again.**

**TS: Good to see you!**

**WR: Thank you. Same here!**