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Lee Roy Selmon oral history interview by Andrew Huse, April 6, 2004

Lee Roy Selmon (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

College experience

Mr. Selmon was recruited to the University of Oklahoma out of high school as a student athlete. He “really enjoyed the experience there,” valuing his relationships with coaches, teachers, friends, and fans. After four years, he graduated from OU with a degree in education. “The experience was ... some of the most fun times that I’ve had in my life.”

Move to Tampa; Tampa Bay Buccaneers

After college graduation, Selmon was drafted by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers expansion team in 1976, which was “truly a blessing, I always thank God for that ... the opportunity to play at the next level of professional sports.” He found the Tampa Bay area “a wonderful place to live and raise a family and as a result, some twenty-eight years later I still reside here.”

Playing for the Buccaneers expansion team gave Selmon and his teammates the opportunity to “[make] history all the time ... and that [was] a unique position to be in.” The region and community also had a particular appeal to Selmon, who remembers, “To be in Florida in the winter ... [that] was really nice!” The Tampa Bay area also offered many wonderful opportunities for Selmon and his family. “To me it’s all about people, and them opening doors ... for you to get involved, not only professionally, but in various community efforts as well.”

Move to USF

In 1993, Selmon received a phone call from the athletic director at USF, Paul Griffin, who offered him a role in the development of a football program at South Florida. “I just saw that as a once in a lifetime opportunity ... to ... facilitate lots of young men getting an opportunity to get a college education.” He was hired as the Associate Athletic Director for External Affairs. “It’s a big undertaking, and it requires an awful lot of teamwork across the board ... I think we had great leadership, great enthusiasm.”

USF administrative relations to athletics

Selmon arrived at USF near the end of Francis Borkowski's tenure as president. He remembers Borkowski was "instrumental ... [in] developing the football program." When Betty Castor was hired, she "picked up the torch with the same type of enthusiasm."

Increased exposure for the university

Selmon asserts that a football team brings "great exposure" to a university, facilitating an increased awareness of the institution and its programs nationally. Along with self-promotion and student retention, the program also "helps with the spirit [and] the student experience" on campus.

Program offices

The football program's offices are currently housed in the Physical Education building. A new athletic center is nearing completion, and the program will be relocated there.

Early program; supporters

"When Coach Leavitt came aboard, he did an outstanding job ... the students – you can't leave them out – their passion and their enthusiasm for it was just overwhelming and ... they're the driving force behind this success." Alumni and community members also provided significant support for the early development of the football program at USF.

"First Team"

Early along in the program, they created a list of "first team" members, which consisted of people who contributed their energies and resources to creating an endowment for the project. "I'm so thankful to all of our first team members because they were the ones who stepped up to the plate and made their commitments ... and laid the financial foundation ... upon which we continue to grow."

Initial practices; first season

When Coach Leavitt came aboard in 1996, he hired his assistant coaches and began the recruiting process. It had been determined that initially the Bulls Football Team was to play at the Division 1-AA level. They had one year to construct the program from the ground-up, and after a year of scrimmages the first season was set to begin in the fall of 1997. "It was totally from scratch ... some very humble beginnings ... everybody just supported each other ... we [knew] that it was going to take time and a lot of hard work."

Challenges

"All the challenges were met, which suggests to me that there was a great passion and enthusiasm about it in the first place." Initially, raising a \$5 million endowment was necessary before the program moved forward. The stadium contract was also an important concern, determining where the team would host its games. "We found [the goals] to be relatively easily obtainable ... things really began to kind of fall in place."

First game

The team's first game was played at Raymond James Stadium in the fall of 1997. Selmon recalls, "I was so emotionally charged up about it, as was everyone else ... Ill never forget – it was a great game, and our Bulls had their inaugural win at 80-3 ... so it was off to a great start." "It was a lot of excitement for a whole lot of reasons and maybe a little bit of stress too."

"The thing about it is, you enjoy your first game and you're underway with your first season, but you realize that it's an ongoing challenge ... today we're still striving to ensure this program becomes the very best it can be ... we still have a lot of work."

Conference play

One of the goals for the program was to make it part of an athletic conference. To become a 1-A program, a team must have a certain seating capacity, a minimum number of scholarships available, and the ability to compete with other teams within the division. "Everything was in place ... Once we began to market who we were and what our goals and objectives were, Conference USA invited us to join [them]."

Personal experiences and approach

Selmon tries to use every aspect of his experiences to inform the manner in which he approaches his involvement with the USF athletic department. He makes academics a high priority, a notion which he stresses upon student-athletes at South Florida. "You're here to get an education first, and really athletics is a means of getting that done ... I try to encourage them [not to] lose that priority."

His involvement in business and banking provided important networking skills that Selmon later relied upon in his promotion of the football program at USF. "I don't think I can recall ever being turned down for an appointment ... People were interested in what was developing here, so from that standpoint it was very positive ... and its what you're talking about that does the selling – I'm just a messenger."

Student athletes; athletics at the university level

"Our student athletes ... have quite a responsibility at a young age ... we try to encourage them ... but it's nothing that they can't handle." Selmon eschews the notion that university athletics detract from a student's academic program. "It brings more life to the campus, more enthusiasm ... it just enhances the experience ... I see it as ... helping the academic mission of the university [by] raising its profile [and] raising its awareness ... I hope this program can be an asset to South Florida."

With eighteen different sports at USF, Selmon "support[s] them all ... all of our student athletes are very important to us."

Successes and accomplishments

"This University has really [come] a long way through the years, even during the short time that I've been here. It has been an exciting place to work ... it's really feeling more and more like a traditional university setting – and that's just exciting ... To me that's

what it's all about ... We don't want to lose focus on the real mission of why each one of those students are here, no matter what team they're on, we want them to have the best college experience – to be ready for life after they leave here.”

Service as Athletic Director

As Athletic Director, he “just wanted to set a course of action,” making sure that morale was high and the program was operating with great integrity and honesty while promoting teamwork and a collective agenda for student athletics. “All I can ask is that you put your best effort forward and respect each other ... no one person can get it done ... we are all very important to the success [of the program].”

Moving on

Because Selmon has had some health-related issues, he was forced to “sit back and evaluate some things.” He is particularly proud of the nearly three years that he served as the athletic director at USF. “I’m excited also to still be a part of continued growth and development of our university and the athletic department ... there are still some wonderful challenges ... there is still history to be made.”

“It’s just been a wonderful experience for me, an opportunity that I don’t take lightly ... something that me and my wife and children are very grateful for ... We’re so excited too about the future ... I really believe it can be something very special.”

Advice for future student athletes

“Always keep your priorities in line, be honest with yourself. Knowing that whatever the goals you have set, believe in yourself that you can get those done. Obviously school is very important, no matter what those goals may be.”

End of Interview