

January 14, 2011



An interview with:

COACH BLANKENSHIP

BUBBA CUNNINGHAM: First of all, welcome. Really appreciate everyone being here. Today is Bill Blankenship day. This is a tremendous day for the University of Tulsa and for Tulsa athletics. But before I bring Bill up here to address you as The University of Tulsa head football coach, I'd like to make a few remarks, and actually it may be more than a few remarks, because I feel so passionately about Bill being our head football coach.

Bill came to The University of Tulsa in 1975 to play quarterback instead of going to the University of Oklahoma to play defense. He had a very successful career, but I can tell you, the campus today is not what it was when you got here in 1975.

This campus has changed a great deal because of leadership and vision, and the leadership at The University of Tulsa is outstanding. And I want to thank President Upham for his leadership and commitment and dedication to making The University of Tulsa a better place.

I'm an avid reader of business books and two of my favorite books are "Good to Great" and "Build to Last." This past summer in addition to those two books, we were given a book to read by President Upham in how the social sector is affected as well as companies by the authors of Jim Collins and Jerry Porras. Both of those books are about corporations and about the social sector talk about sustaining enduring companies. And there are examples after examples of how great companies sustain success over time, and they're built on core principles of value, integrity, and character.

When Bill Blankenship came to visit with our committee the other day, he did not talk much at all in the beginning about football. He talked about his personal core values: integrity, honesty, respect, courage, and commitment are just a few that he mentioned.

And I can tell you that Bill Blankenship opened the minds and eyes of our committee that day, not just with his thoughts about personal integrity and character, but about the vision for the football program and about the vision for the university.

As you can imagine, when you're in a search, occasionally you get input from people. I would like to share with you one piece of input that I received in this process, and it came to me from Keith Bailey, a trustee.

He wrote to me in an email, "Hiring a football coach is analogous to deciding on a new CEO in my world. Statistics will tell you someone promoted from within will have a statistically much higher success rate than someone from outside. He also has the advantage of not having to learn the community or the donor base. This will allow you to concentrate any discussion with him on how we build the program here. The key is you can concentrate on only that and not worry about all the ancillary stuff."

Keith, I thank you for that sage advice. Without question, of all of the coaches that I've ever worked with over the years, Bill Blankenship personifies integrity, character, and leadership.

We have had a lot of coaches come through TU, and we've had a lot of highly successful coaches with impressive resumes and styles. Bill Blankenship has been a head football coach at the high school level for 20 years and averaged more than 10 wins a season. Similar to his experience at at Tulsa, Union High School did not look like it does today when Bill Blankenship

arrived.

He knows how to build an organization and move it from good to great. Bill Blankenship has the fundamental core values and principles to lead this team as he has done it his entire life.

For the past four years he's been a loyal, dedicated college assistant coach, and he's a leader, a proven winner. He knows this community; he knows the university; he knows the football team; and I cannot be more proud to introduce to you the new Head Coach of The University of Tulsa, Bill Blankenship.

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Thank you so much. To say this is a great day is an understatement. Let me first thank my bride. Those of you that haven't met Angie, you should and you will. I am in the club that a lot of coaches are in that we completely outkicked our coverage when we got married, but Angie is my bride.

Then my pride is here. I've got my sons and my mom and dad and a lot of family here, and I just want to go thank you guys.

Stead and Bubba, just thank you so much for the opportunity, for the trust, for the confidence that you've placed in me. I don't take it lightly. The fact that the trustees and the selection committee would entrust this program to me is a very big deal, and I know that, and I know you know that.

Who would have thought. Could have said that a few times. Bubba mentioned that I'm from the major metropolitan area down in Southeastern Oklahoma, Spiro. And when I was growing up there, my dad was a coach, my mom was an English teacher, and that was the culture that I grew up in.

And who would have thought that on a Tuesday night in January, a lot of years ago, that a guy named F.A. Dry would be in our living room and would talk to me about an opportunity to come to the University of Tulsa because really they were the only team around that were throwing the ball and had a pro-style passing attack.

Who would have thought that I would have really turned down Barry Switzer sitting in my living room. How crazy is that? But they were running the wishbone, and I knew I couldn't run out of sight in three days. So consequently I accepted an opportunity to come to the University of Tulsa. And that was probably one of the greatest decisions in my life, and, clearly, setting course maybe what we see happening today.

I was fortunate to get the experience here playing for F.A. Dry, but also my first quarterback coach was Jerry Rome. Then as you go down the

list of the guys that influenced my life, the coaches that I was blessed to get to play under and around, names like Tom Ososki and John Wittenborn, may not mean much to you, but they were impactful to me.

Then I had a new Head Coach, John Cooper, who in the coach's or the national Hall of Fame now, and we're going to induct into our Hall of Fame soon. John Cooper I experienced playing for him. Then add to that, that my last quarterback coach here was a guy named Larry Coker. Went on to have some pretty good success of his own and a National Championship.

How does that impact me? Simply this: I think that even if I hadn't gotten a degree from the University of Tulsa, I think I would have been smart enough to absorb some of what I was around. I was very blessed to be around great coaches who influenced my life.

I had no intention as when Angie first accepted my proposal, she thought, at least -- and I think I thought a little bit that way -- that we were going down a path we actually might work for a real company and make some real money, and use my Tulsa degree along those ways. But the influence came back in my life, and I had an opportunity to be a football coach.

I realized pretty quickly that that was who I am. That was the calling on my life, and that's what I wanted to do with my life. That path led me back to my alma mater, Spiro High School where I got to coach at my alma mater and get a chance to take them to a state championship game.

Then who would have thought 25 plus years later I'm at my alma mater. I get a call from Todd Graham giving me a chance to join his staff here at my alma mater.

Who would have thought that four years later we would have experienced three double digit seasons wins that we would have had the opportunity to win three bowl games that we would have been able to accomplish a win at Notre Dame and finish with a great win at Hawaii.

Then who would have thought that somebody would leave that place and open up the door for somebody else. I am so thankful to get to coach the guys that are here, the players that are here. These young men are incredible. Guys that I've been around, and I'm excited to be a part of what they're going to do and to continue down a path of success.

Bubba talked about good to great. I think it

should be said very clearly, Todd Graham has taken this program to a new level with his leadership and with the staff and especially with the players that came into this program. There is no anticipation, no expectation of trying to keep up with that. We're going to take it to another level. It's the only option that I see is to take something that's good and go to great. To take something that's great and try to go to greater.

We're going to do that. We have a tremendous schedule next year. Everybody's aware of that, and I spoke to the players this afternoon, and, to a man, we are excited about that challenge and looking forward to that challenge to see what the current team that's ranked in the top 25, to see how we'll fare starting next year and chasing those dreams.

So with that, let me say thank you, and we're really excited. Take some questions.

Q. What does this mean for you, all your ties to this community and to this university?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Well, I appreciate it. I mean, it's overwhelming. I think to be the head coach at a Division 1 program anywhere is a tremendous blessing. But to getting to back to your alma mater and to be a place that I feel like I know inside out, to get to choose to do that is just a tremendous blessing.

Q. When you were coaching at Union, you got together a group of prominent coaches in this area and asked 'Where was Tulsa football going?', and at that time it was pretty low. From that point to here, what kind of journey has it been?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Well, I think it's amazing. I appreciate that. I thought back on those days. There were empty stadiums, not very many wins, and to see where the program has come.

Now that I have the job, I'm not having to butter anybody up on this. But I'm telling you, I told these gentlemen the same thing, if you don't recognize the changes in this university that have occurred since Dr. Upham and Bubba Cunningham have been here, that leadership has taken this practical to another level.

They would be the first to say it's not been on their own. But this campus, this program, this university, this stadium, these facilities, that's because we have leadership and we have people in this community that care.

I really believe that we're going to be able to rally people. That we're going to be able to rally this community even more, and that people will vote when they come out to our games.

Q. Talk about your staff?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Our staff is going to be rapidly put in place. We have some great holdovers from the last staff. Guys that all had chances to go other places, and those four guys are remaining. I guess I'm one of them, so that's four of us.

But I'm excited that Van Malone, and Archie McDaniel, and Jess Loepp are here. Actually, there are a couple guys we're trying to get to come back that didn't know if they had an opportunity. We'll see what happens.

But I think you'll see us have some announcements very quickly. We'll have guys in place. We'll have coaches that will join us at some point in time during our recruiting weekend. We're very excited about the quality of men that I've already contacted and have agreed to be a part of this.

Q. What about recruiting at this point?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: It's a big deal. We've got a big recruiting week coming in. Fortunately, we have most of our young men committed. We think that they're going to be excited about the decisions for continuity.

I loved what Bubba shared in terms of programs that Mr. Bailey shared with us, and I think people are comfortable when they have continuity. Now we expect that the recruits will do that, but it's certainly our job to continue to work on them. And I think we've got a pretty good track record on that, and we'll try to get better and better with it.

Q. How much of your recruiting time at this point is re-recruiting?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Hundred percent. We can't assume everybody's with us. We know that. We're going to re-recruit. But that are started with our own team. We've got to make sure we're all in, and I think we are. Then we'll start down.

I am very impressed with our staff so far. When I talked about Coach Malone and Coach Loepp and Coach McDaniel, they've been at it all morning having a plan together of just

systematically going through our recruits that we already have. And then also we already know that the guys we have targeted.

Q. Talk about your confidence moving forward?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: For me personally, absolutely. It's kind of one of those things where lack of confidence and self-esteem is not an issue for me. I say that tongue-in-cheek because that's kind of a joke in our family. We're not sure we understand that.

But if you had asked me four years ago are you ready to be the head coach of Tulsa, I would have told you I was, and I would have believed it with all my heart.

But I can tell you four years later having an opportunity to coach multiple positions, having an opportunity to coach special teams that allowed me to reach into defensive players and to offensive players and to have success in all those areas have reconfirmed to me what I needed to know and also what I believe in the way we do things.

So I'm a much more confident college coach now than I was. I think I know much more about the internal workings and the differences in high school and college.

Q. Did you get a sense that you might have a shot here or you were going to get it (No microphone).

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Lot of nervousness. I think I told the selection committee it felt like game day to me. I was fired up. I was ready to roll, and I was determined. I've used this analogy a few times. I was determined that if I got an opportunity to get in the batter's box, I wasn't going to watch the pitch go by. I was going to swing for the fence.

We swung for the fence. I felt like it went good. I think I've told Angie that we've seen enough baseball and we know that people can dive over the wall and snatch that thing. So we certainly know that it wasn't up to me, but I thought that I had done well enough to be considered.

At least baseball analogies will stay out. We'll talk about the Yankees if you want to.

I'm going to coach a lot of positions, but a lot of that are specifically depends on as we put our staff together. But I have some great ideas about how to do that. We'll just have to see. We'll have announcements about that later on.

Q. Will next year's team look like this year's team?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: That's a great question. I think it will be more similar than it is different. I think the thing that is important for people to recognize is that defenses all have to do similar things. We talk about a three-four or a four-three, or a three-three.

When you get against spread offenses, everybody has to be able to lineup in all those different ways. So the actual terminology is not nearly as important of how we go about it.

Our players are familiar with the system. We're not out to change the system that they're comfortable with. We've won a lot of games with this system, but within that, I think people misunderstand that that means we're going to run the same plays, the same way (No microphone).

It was impressive and awesome to get to work with Gus Malzahn in our offense where we led the country for two years straight. Chad Morris is a wonderful coach, an absolutely great human being. I absolutely love him with what he did with our offense.

But it is a real mistake to think that Chad ran Gus's offense. Chad had great influence from Gus and had some, I think, some great ideas that he continued to implement.

But the offense this year was unique to us. It's probably a little self-serving, but I try to remind people that starting in 1992 at Union High School, we were running the no-huddle, hurry-up offense that didn't catch on, and we ran it for about eight or nine years.

I say that tongue-in-cheek because later on it became very fashionable to talk about. But if anybody has watched what we've done offensively over the years understands it's going to be an exciting, fast-paced, up-tempo, ball's going to be in the air. That is the only way I've ever done it. And now I actually think I know a little bit about special teams (smiling).

Q. What is key to moving forward?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: To avoid believing that we've accomplished anything yet for next year. Every team every year is a new battle. The schedule will take care of itself. We know that we've got to get geared up for those first three weeks. That is not what the season's about. We want to go through those game -- those games are going to help determine where we are as a

program. It's going to be the measuring stick.

But I would never -- how I can say it -- I would rather approach those games with this returning squad than any squad I've ever coached. We have the guys ready to take a team that finished number 24 in the country and make great strides to go further.

I love the fact that we're coming at that with experienced players on offense and defense. And not just experienced players, experienced great players and great leaders.

Q. Will you be competing for a coaching staff?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Well, I hope we're not going after the same guys. But thanks to Bubba's support, we're going to have ours -- I know who will win that battle. We're going to have ours together pretty quick. Thanks.

Q. Talk about the change or challenge in recruiting from here?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: The good news is a lot of those guys were guys I was recruiting anyway, so we've been on that all week. Just saying be patient, be patient, be patient. In most cases, those guys were committed to this program. They weren't committed to a particular coach.

I know that seems unusual in today's environment. But one of the things we've sold here is this is a unique place. We think that we are really -- there is no school like the University of Tulsa. If you live in our world, you know that we brag about being the smallest Division 1 playing football school in America. We brag about the fact that our academic standards are so high that it takes special young men to come here and be successful.

So most of the guys that we have committed on our list right now are guys that actually want that environment. Some of them had told -- I know because I actually do read the paper -- but some of them I think told you that they were attracted to the other players that were there in the program, so that's what we're going to continue to do.

I think now that we have leadership in place, we'll be getting after it pretty hard.

Q. Talk about being a part of the TU Family?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: Well, the one thing, and I think you have to give Coach Kragthorpe and Coach Graham tremendous credit

on this. They rallied the letter men back. They rallied a lot of our guys that had been in the family that some had gotten put out, and some were frustrated and they've done a good job with that.

I think I'm in a position to take that even further. We have a very tight-knit family, but some of us aren't as tight as we should be, and we're going to really make great strides and great effort into maximizing the base that we have of being the smallest Division 1 playing university in the country. It takes everybody. We've got to have our whole crew, and hopefully we'll be able to do that.

Q. Talk about when you gave up high school coaching and taking a chance to step into the college ranks?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: The one thing I've learned about faith is it's hard if you look forward. It's easy when you look back.

Q. Talk about the importance of having an Oklahoma native as the head coach at TU?

COACH BLANKENSHIP: I think it's very important. It's what we've seen. It's what we've seen happen. We have a track record of saying that it must be important because of the young men that we're able to bring right now.

Make no mistake, we've always said we start in Tulsa and then Oklahoma. But we will be in Texas. We'll be in Dallas. We'll be in east Texas. We've got people on our staff that are the best recruiters I know or will be on our staff, that are the best recruiters I know. And the best recruiters to have ever come through Union High School when I was sitting on the other side of the desk. Gave me a tremendous leg up in finding out who are effective recruiters. How do they go about it.

Then another, and Angie's had some of this, we were fortunate as parents to go through recruiting with our three sons. And each of them gave us a picture as to that's a good way. That's not a good way. I wouldn't do that. I will do this.

We feel like we've got an opportunity to get into specifically Oklahoma and Texas to find the very best players that fit this university. Thank you.

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