

Tempe Oral History Project

Narrator: FRANK KUSH

Interviewer: MARK PRY

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Frank Kush was born in Pennsylvania. He was an All-American football player at Michigan State. In 1955, he came to Arizona State College to be an assistant football coach under head coach Dan Devine. In 1958 he became the head football coach. He quickly developed a winning football team, and built Arizona State's reputation as a major national contender in collegiate football. He was involved in the creation of the Western Athletic Conference in 1962, and was primarily responsible for bringing ASU into the PAC-10 Conference in 1978. He was fired in 1979 due to controversies over student athletes' receiving unearned class credits, and an incident in which he allegedly hit the helmet of an ASU team member.

In this interview he talks about the ASU-UA rivalry, the Sun Angels Foundation, gaining national recognition for the ASU football team and individual athletes, ASU's entry into PAC-10 Conference, his personal coaching philosophy and reputation as a disciplinarian, events surrounding his dismissal as head coach in 1979, and his career since leaving ASU.

This is the second of two interviews. See also the transcript for the first interview, [OH-151](#).

FULL TEXT TRANSCRIPT

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BEGIN SIDE ONE

PRY: As I was saying, we had gotten in our first tape, up to the early '70s. I thought we could, rather than talk about, just go through the things on a season-by-season basis, talk about a few sort of themes. And one of the things I wanted to ask you about was the rivalry with U of A. You said when we were talking before that when you first came here with Dan Devine, the most important goal of the program was to beat U of A, to do it consistently. How did that rivalry change, the time you were at ASU? I know ASU started to win some games, but what happened to the rivalry? Maybe you could tell me a little bit about that.

KUSH: Well, really, what had happened, we won more. (chuckles) And originally, as I'd mentioned earlier, when we came to Arizona State in 1955, everything in the community was "U of A this," "U of A that." The two communities, Phoenix and Tucson, battled everywhere, the legislators battled everywhere. In addition to that, any kind of recognition, it was either Tucson, or, say, Arizona State, and that time was Tempe. So we developed quite a rivalry over the years. And of course I'll never forget, I was up at a coaching clinic up in Flagstaff, and I'd just taken over as the head coach at Arizona State -- College, at that time -- and Jim LaRue was the coach down at U of A, and he was speaking at the clinic at Flagstaff, which was the high school coaches' football clinic, and he said, "Oh, there's Coach Kush in the background. He makes my job so much easier!" And I said under my breath, "You dah, dah, dah, dah, you'll never win again!" Anyway, so we won pretty handily after that. In fact, I think in 25 years we won 19 ball games. But the rivalry really got to the point where it was very intense. In fact, I remember so vividly Dr. Gammage, that first game I'm talkin' about when I took over as a head coach and we lost to them. At that time, ASU was relatively small and everybody used to have coffee in the morning at the faculty lounge, and we're in there and Dr. Gammage sat down, and he says, "You know, I want to congratulate you on a fine season." And I said, "Gosh, we lost to U of A, that's really bad." He said, "No, don't feel bad they beat you. Now we'll get our appropriations from the Board of Regents," because the Board of Regents, as they are today, were dominated by U of A people, and I think the ratio still hasn't changed a bit. They still have the upper hand when it comes to the Board of Regents from that area, and the Board of Regents from the Phoenix area. So it always has been that rivalry. And the same way, I could mention one of the games that we played down there. Their announcer -- we had two quarterbacks at that time, one was Joe Zuger, and the other one was Ron Cosner, and we put Ron Cosner in as a halfback, to throw a halfback pass, because being a quarterback he was very competent at throwing the ball. So the announcer -- I'll never forget this -- he said, "Arizona State now has two quarterbacks in the

backfield," telling the University of Arizona defensive team to look out for the pass. That used to go on. And then their student body used to be just so avid. It was just remarkable. In fact, they used to have the opposing team sit on the same sidelines where their student body was, so they used to throw their cards down, their play cards and everything else. So we used to keep our helmets on, on the sidelines, because you were always gettin' bombed. So the rivalry was really intense, and I think has got to the point where U of A has kind of dominated it, so they're back to normal conditions again.

PRY: What happened when the game was up here? Was it the same intensity?

KUSH: Oh, yes. Yeah, there was no question about it. They used to come up here and paint the "A" mountain, paint it in kind of the Wildcat colors, sometimes blue and some other colors. But no, it was just as intense as it always has been. I was really impressed with it, being from Michigan and playing at Michigan State, we had a couple of great rivalries with Notre Dame and University of Michigan. And there's no question in my mind that the U of A-Arizona State rivalry was just as competitive.

PRY: Now, what do you. . . . Do you go to ASU games now?

KUSH: Yes, I do.

PRY: What do you think of the rivalry now?

KUSH: Well, you know, just like anything else, the U of A has dominated 'em recently, so the rivalry is not as intense as it HAD been. I think the ideal situation is for teams to win on an equal basis, and then you maintain that parity in recruiting, and it's certainly beneficial, not only from the standpoint of recruiting, but we talk about bragging rights in a state, and I think that still goes on. It certainly is beneficial to the team that wins, because it makes it so much easier to recruit through the state of Arizona.

PRY: Yeah. In working on this exhibit, I found out that ASU won the first game ever between the two teams, but then they went something like 18 games without scoring a touchdown against U of A, because of course in the early part of the century, the U of A was becoming a full-fledged university, whereas the Normal School wasn't much more than a high school. (KUSH: No, exactly.) And it was reflected in the teams. Now, we talked a little bit about the construction of Sun Devil Stadium and what that meant to the program. Not only did it allow more fans to come to the game, but because you had higher attendance, you were able to get more revenue from the games, and therefore attract bigger teams. So was that one of the things that keyed the growth of the football program into a major, major program, that ranked nationally?

KUSH: Yes, there's no question about it. When we're able to bring in teams like

Minnesota, and say, North Carolina, you certainly have to give them a guarantee, a higher-price guarantee to come and play. So now with the Sun Devil Stadium, which went from 30,000 to about 37,000, and then 42,000, and then 50-some thousand. And then if I recall, it was about 60-some, then to 72,000. So when you can attract the major teams because you have to give them a certain monetary guarantee to come and play, then you're going to have, I think, more competitive teams, more higher-ranked teams, more nationally-known teams. And I think this is natural, that's the way the program was built, and therefore you get more revenue, and you could expand your program. And I might add that a lot of the revenue that was derived through football certainly was used for other sports, whether it may be some of the non-revenue sports. And I think it's beneficial that way, principally because the amount of money that you ARE going to bring in for football.

PRY: Uh-huh. Now, what else, in terms of just physical growth, facilities and the like, what else changed while you were there? (Kush chuckles) I mean, what were your practice facilities like when you got here, and what were they when you left? I mean, there must have been growth _____.

KUSH: Yes, the growth was dramatic. As I'd mentioned earlier, when we first came here, my first three years were in Goodwin Stadium, that held about 13,000. And then our first game of my first year that I'd taken over, which was 1958, the season of '58, we played the University of Hawaii, and then we played West Texas. At that time, Arizona State was a relatively small institution as far as student enrollment. I would imagine it wasn't any more than ten or twelve thousand. And then you could gradually see the growth in the buildings, et cetera. There was no student union at the time. There were a limited number of dormitories. In fact, the main road went right through the campus, which is now College Avenue, that is blocked off. And of course Mill and University, at that time, that was the end of the campus. There wasn't anything beyond that, other than the football stadium. And of course you have all the dormitories now and the aquatic facility and several other buildings. But yes, the growth was dramatic. And I'm sure that was attributed to the need for the academics in the state of Arizona, because all three institutions were growing. But principally because of ASU being in the metropolitan area, I think there was more of a need at that time for the growth here at what I call the metropolitan Phoenix area.

PRY: Now, when you came to ASU with Dan Devine, did the football team have a practice field, or did they practice at Goodwin Stadium?

KUSH: We practiced right adjacent to Goodwin Stadium, which was part of the baseball field. And we did use Goodwin Stadium on, say, pre-games, and also Fridays or so, but as a general rule we didn't want to ruin that field, but we did use it periodically when we had to practice at night, because that was the only place that had lights at the time, so we did have to use Goodwin Stadium as our evening practice sites, which were basically most of September and part of

October.

PRY: Did Goodwin become a practice field when Sun Devil was built?

KUSH: Yes, Goodwin became the practice field. I might add that it was a dormitory, also.

PRY: Yeah, there was Haigler Hall.

KUSH: Haigler Hall was there, on both sides. And then they just had it on the east side. And we used that for offices, eventually. In fact, they used . . . if I recall, there were some of the Biology Department labs in there also. They had live animals in there.

PRY: (laughs) Do you happen to know when Goodwin was actually torn down?

KUSH: No. I would be speculating and say probably it had to be torn down, 'cause we still used it periodically for practice. I would say probably in the '70s sometime (PRY: Yeah.) 'cause we still used it to dress down there on many occasions.

PRY: Yeah. Well, I know they played -- Tempe High and McClintock High played their home games there for a while. Then they played their rivalry games there until the stadium was torn down. That was well into the '60s, and possibly the '70s. What was the role of the Sun Angels in the growth of the program?

KUSH: I was really impressed with the Sun Angels when I first came here. The good thing about them, they were very active, but they did not intervene. They didn't get personally involved with the players, where there were any kind of inducements, et cetera. And John Curry, people like Mills, and Mike Castille, they were people what I would call people of great integrity, but they had a great following of Arizona State. In fact, Mike Castille, who was the executive administrator -- executive secretary, I should say -- he was a University of Arizona football coach, and they hired him away from the U of A to come up here and run the Sun Angels, which he did, and did a commendable job. Mike was a great community man, he was a very devoted Sun Devil, and he did a commendable job as far as unifying the Sun Angel organization. And they were the primary monetary organization that made the athletic program as successful as it was. There's no question in my mind that the Sun Angels were the epitome of booster groups. In addition to that, they probably did more, in many respects, of stimulating the growth within the community, besides getting funds for the various programs.

PRY: Uh-huh. Now, ASU switched to the PAC-Ten in 1978?

KUSH: Yes. I might mention my tenure there at 25 years, we went from the

Border Conference to the WAC Conference [Western Athletic Conference] to the PAC-Ten [Pacific Athletic Conference], so we saw quite a contrast in the competitive clubs, when I say the clubs and leagues. We went into the PAC-Ten, as you'd mentioned, in '78. I personally didn't think we were ready at the time. In fact, I was kind of opposed to it. And the reason I was opposed to it, I was hoping that we would have got in, but give us at least two or three years to develop the recruiting and the type of programs that would be needed to get into the PAC-Ten. We just jumped in all of a sudden with both feet and hands and the whole bit, and it was sink or swim. And I thought we did a commendable job in many respects, in some of the programs. In other ones, I'm sure the expectations were higher than we had reached, but by the same token, I think it's really been beneficial as far as national recognition. Prior to that, the only recognition we received, or the players did, were the various bowl games, starting off with that Peach Bowl game that we talked about, (PRY: Right) and then the various Fiesta Bowl games. But until that time, 'til getting in the PAC-Ten, we had a lot of great athletes in the Border Conference, in the WAC Conference, but they did not get the recognition that I felt that they deserved, principally because of playing night games and being in what I would call a conference that was sandwiched between the PAC-Ten and the Big Eight schools. So, again, I would say the night games, and also the conference recognition was probably detrimental to us in many respects.

PRY: Yeah. So you were in favor of the switch, you just wanted it to be done more slowly?

KUSH: Slowly, right, exactly. I was hoping that it would have taken us two or three years, and then say, "Okay." This way, you'd have an opportunity to, you know, in the recruiting, selling the youngsters on it, "You're going to be in the PAC-Ten and you're going to have an opportunity to play at this level." It was a DRAMATIC transition, just like you clap your hands and now we're in the PAC-Ten.

PRY: What did it mean to your players?

KUSH: Well, the players, you know, it was a great stimulant to them from the standpoint of motivation. I remember playing SC [University of Southern California] -- SC was ranked one or two, and I don't know where we were ranked, but we were ranked pretty high. They came over here ranked number one in the country, and we handled 'em -- I'm not sayin' very easily, but it was a great football game. We won 20-7 or 21-7. It was a type of a ball game that could have gone either way. But we had some great athletes, youngsters like Mike Haynes, and Junior Ah-You and all those people, so we were not second fiddle to the best in the nation -- we just didn't get the recognition, and I think that game specifically raised quite a few eyebrows and say, "Hey, the Sun Devils are for real!"

PRY: So what it represented then was a chance to prove to the nation that you

were as good as you thought you were? Is that the way. . . .

KUSH: Well, you know, we always thought we were good, but I think we had to prove it to other people in other conferences, in other institutions, that we were consistently good, even though we had been in the WAC previously and we had fantastic success. Now we're in the PAC-Ten, everybody said, "Well, the competition is going to be a lot stiffer, a lot more demanding." Yes, it was, but our people were capable of meeting that level of play.

PRY: Was there a difference? Did you notice a change in the national media attention when you went to the PAC-Ten?

KUSH: Yes. We got more television coverage, more media would come to the ball games and talk about the -- the written media as well as the television media. You become more recognizable, you're gonna be invited to more bowl games, which we were, and you're an attraction, and that's what the media loves. You know, kinda bein' the new kid on the block, I'm sure they were certainly lookin' for us to -- some of 'em were lookin' for us to be as exciting as we'd been before, and we had great athletes, and we were, and I think we continued on in the same fashion.

PRY: Looking back on your coaching career at ASU, is there one game that you would single out as your best game, or the one that you feel the most proud of, or would think of as. . . .

KUSH: Well, in 25 years of being an assistant and a head coach, you know there were many games. But I think the most significant games, probably, in my opinion, were two of 'em: the Peach Bowl game of 1971. . . . This was the first opportunity for us to be recognized nationally, playing a good North Carolina team, which we did, we won the ball game pretty handily. I mean, it snowed, it rained, and the whole bit. Then the next game was, probably the epitome of all of 'em, was the Nebraska game in 1975, where they were highly touted. They were second in the PAC-Ten, they were one of the best teams in the country. And they only lost one ball game, and we were playing them. We were undefeated until that time, and it was a great ball game. We won 14-7, and ironically, my son, Danny, was a kicker, and he had three field goals, and we won the ball game. Fred Mortensen, a local youngster, did a great job as quarterbacking, backing up for Dennis Sproul. He went for two points and we scored it. But that game probably, I would say was the . . . probably the epitome of recognition for all Sun Devil teams.

PRY: That was an undefeated season.

KUSH: Yes, it was an undefeated season. We ended up number one in Sporting News, and we ended up two in UPI and AP which I thought was a slap in the face, because. . . .

PRY: Who was number one?

KUSH: I think they had Oklahoma, and I think Nebraska had beaten Oklahoma, or something like that. (PRY: I see.) So I was really disappointed because there was no question, in MY opinion, [who] the number one football team [was]. And I might be biased, but we had some great athletes. We had the likes of Dennis Sproul, J. D. Hill, and some outstanding football players that went on and played professional football.

PRY: Do you think you would have gotten the number one ranking if you'd been in the PAC-Ten then?

KUSH: No question about it. Yeah, we'd have got it hands down.

PRY: Yeah. Well, what did you think or hope was the importance of playing football to your players? The last time we talked a little bit, you talked about how as a coach you sought to instill self-discipline in your players. In addition to that, what did you want them to get out of the program?

KUSH: Well, I think the primary objective -- and I could use myself as an example -- is getting an education. I think athletics, to me, is for so many youngsters, this is their only opportunity, ever, to have an opportunity to go on and go into college or get an advanced degree. (PRY: Right.) So I was an advocate of that, because I came up that way, and so I was very demanding with our youngsters about going to class and making sure that they did well academically. I thought as our roles as coaches, number one, we had to make sure that the youngster was doing a good job academically, number two was athletically, and number three was socially. But I think the number two and three kind of go hand-in-hand. We did have a disciplined program, we demanded a lot from our youngsters. What I always hoped for was when they were freshmen and sophomores, that we as coaches were the extension of their parents' arms, and paid close attention to them, were very demanding of them academically, socially, and athletically. And then once we set the standard, they would take over, going into their junior and senior years, and be their leaders, and we wouldn't HAVE TO continually harass them about going to class or about being in shape, et cetera. There's no question in my mind that it's a carry-over into other activities. If a youngster does well athletically and he maintains the same principles, the same fundamentals, the same focus, and he can do well academically, getting the maximum out of his God-given talent. And I think it's a carry-over in other activities, because there's so many attributes that you learn in athletics. I'm talking about determination, desire, perseverance, not quitting -- all of those apply to any other segment of life, regardless of whatever it may be. And because I was brought up that way, and played that way in high school, and our coaches felt very strongly about that, and the same way with college, I think it was a carry-over for me. I LOVE to see people be successful. If they're fortunate to go on and play professional football,

that was an added bonus. But MY main objective was, number one, to make sure that they had an opportunity to get an education.

PRY: So in terms of what they would be doing AFTERWARDS, your assumption was that with most of them, they would NOT be playing football?

KUSH: Very few of them, 3% of them. I would say probably around 3% of all of the youngsters that we had over the years were going to go in and play professional football and make a living from it, because the competition at that level is a fine line that is just remarkable. The main objective was to make sure they'd get their education, and if they had the God-given ability to go into professional sports, then that was an added plus, and they could capitalize on it. But not that many are going to do it. In all 23, 22 years that I was a head coach, I think we had 126 that went on and played pro ball, which is quite a high number. When you look at it, though, from the total number of youngsters that we had in the program, it was relatively minor.

PRY: How many would you have in the program each year, roughly?

KUSH: I would say over 100. I'd say you'd have about 120 football players, so you're talking about 23 years, that's. . . .

PRY: Four percent of the people, maybe 5%.

KUSH: That's right 4 or 5%. And we had an exceptionally high rate of ones going into pro ball. The average percentage is about 3% coming out of a normal school. And again, because I think that we had a great athletic program, football program, and we demanded a great deal from our youngsters. This was another opportunity for them to come to a program where they would not only have an opportunity to get their degree, but also excel in athletics.

PRY: Now, you knew as a coach that only a very small proportion of these players would go on to play professionally, but did they? How did they see it? Was one of the things you had to do as a coach, to convey to your players the realities of getting into the pros, or not?

KUSH: Well, I really don't, because our program, at that time, was not geared for youngsters to go into professional football, because originally we did not have that many; they didn't receive the recognition; there wasn't the high profile professional sports around the Valley, around the campus, to stimulate that type of thinking. I feel the majority of them came to Arizona State with the idea of getting a degree, and then as the years progressed, then it was the degree plus going into pro ball. And I'm sure now most youngsters coming into the college programs, they all have dreams and desires of thinking of going and being a professional athlete.

PRY: Yeah, that's what I had in mind. You read a lot about these days. . . .

KUSH: Yeah, now, because there's so much media hype in it. (PRY: Exactly.) And there's so much more emphasis at the high school level in high school athletics, in specialization, where a youngster now, he may get a misconception that he is maybe something special. Then he gets to the college level and he finds out he's just another player. But the hype is there, the schools are doing just a dramatic job of stimulating and getting youngsters to excel in various sports, and I think that is kind of a stepping stone from high school to college to pro, which is a natural attraction to someone that excels. And I'm sure the same thing is true academically. Somebody that excels in anything looks way beyond the high school level.

PRY: Yeah. I interviewed Don Wilkinson, the AD for the Tempe Union High School District, and he said, when I asked him about changes that had taken place in high school athletics, he said that perhaps the biggest change in recent years has been specialization on the part of the high school athletes, and the intensity with which they approach their sports, because instead of playing three or four sports, they concentrate.

KUSH: Yeah. See, that's where I disagree with the high school programs today, contrasted to the ones that I had seen previously. Danny White's a good example, Reggie Jackson. Danny White played baseball, basketball, football, and ran track. Reggie Jackson was a great football player in high school, and a great baseball player and a basketball player. He had an opportunity to develop his skills in various activities. I feel that the youngsters that just specialize today are being shortchanged because they could probably be as productive in some other sport, and maybe they're not as good in that particular sport that they're specializing in, and they don't go any further than that. If they developed in some other sports, say at least two others, they would have an opportunity to show their wares in other activities. And in addition to this, by participating in football, it's going to make you a better baseball player. By being involved in baseball, it's going to make you a better football player. I think any time that you're involved in different physical activities, it's going to improve your athletic skills.

PRY: Yeah. Karl Keifer, when I interviewed him, said that he requires his players to participate in at least one other sport.

KUSH: I think that is great. To me, it's good for the student body, it's good for the athlete, and it's good for the school.

PRY: Uh-huh. Now, what kind of relationship did you, as coach at ASU, what kind of relationship did you have with the local high schools?

KUSH: Mark, we really developed the recruiting in the local high schools, because I thought it was imperative that we get as many great athletes from the

state of Arizona through the high school recruiting program. So we put on Pop Warner clinics, free, gratis. We put on high school clinics free, gratis, et cetera, with the idea of making them aware of who we were. Danny White's a good example. Bob Breuning's a good example. They were in our football camps. They didn't have to pay, they were in Pop Warner camps. So we got involved at the Pop Warner level. Then we got involved extensively at the high school level. There's no question in my mind that if you're gonna develop a good program, a good collegiate program, I feel if the resources are there -- meaning, I'm talking about, they have enough athletes in a state, that you should try to get the bulk of your athletes from in-state, because you resolve so many problems. I'm talking about transportation, I'm talking about parents visiting, (PRY: Right.) the local fan interest, et cetera. So I advocated it, and we were very strong about that. In fact, when I first came to Arizona State, our football banquet, we invited the outstanding high school athletes, say at least two from each high school, through the state, with the idea of stimulating them to think about college and certainly Arizona State. And that was done with a reason of attempting to get those youngsters to think in terms of being Sun Devils.

PRY: Yeah. Now, after a while, some of your players then would go on to coach and work in the high schools.

KUSH: Karl Keifer's a good example.

PRY: Yeah, in fact, there's quite a few of 'em out there.

KUSH: Gary Ventura over at Corona del Sol, Mike Clupper here in Tempe.

PRY: Jim Denton?

KUSH: Jim Denton, that's right. And John Aviantos. The Whitmers over at Mesa Community College. Yes, we've had quite a few numbers of former Sun Devils that are coaching now. We have quite a few of 'em that are principals. In fact, the principal at the new Mountain View High School in Tempe is a former Sun Devil. So we have had. . . . Gary Ventura I've mentioned. We have a principal over at Scottsdale School. In fact, my brother Joe, who was a former Sun Devil, he was a coach over at Scottsdale High School, and he was in guidance counseling. So there are quite a few Sun Devils in the Valley that went out and not only proved themselves in the athletic world, but the academic society as well.

PRY: Uh-huh. Well, in 1979 you were dismissed as head coach. (KUSH: Right.) What happened? Tell me about that.

KUSH: Well, what really had transpired is one of the former players had accused me of hitting him during the Washington game in '78. . . .

END SIDE ONE

BEGIN SIDE TWO

KUSH: It did go to trial, it lasted for quite a few months, and I was exonerated. But prior to that, I was dismissed before the trial even came up. So when the trial was going on, I was coaching in Canada at the time.

PRY: Yeah. Now, why do you think you were dismissed? Do you think the University just wanted to avoid the embarrassment?

KUSH: No, I think that there was a lot of misinformation. I don't feel that the proper procedures were taken legally, to do it in what I call a normal, legal procedure. People reacted emotionally, in contrast to waiting for the justice system to take its normal course. When you're involved in a high-profile activity, as we were, believe me, there's a lot of emotion wrapped up in it, and I'm sure that had a lot to do with this particular case.

PRY: Yeah. Now, speaking not of this particular player, did you ever strike players? Every article you read about Frank Kush comes to this image.

KUSH: Well, I used to grab face masks to get the kid's attention, the player's attention. I slapped the headgears. A lot of time I slapped 'em in jest. Sometimes I slapped their headgears to get their attention. As far as punching a player, no, I never punched a player. Did I ever kick a player? No. I remember in grabbing players, I remember one of our players that received two penalties in a particular ball game, and I grabbed along the sideline, pulled him by the shirt and chewed him out. I did not do anything that I would say was abnormal in coaching at that level, or say even a high school level. Yes, I was a very demanding coach, very intense. I wanted the youngsters to be successful. (PRY: Right.) And my probably biggest issue all the time was mental mistakes. I did not want the youngsters to make mental mistakes. If we made physical mistakes, that was part of the game. If you're better than me as a player and say you outdo me, whatever it may be. But I really used to get on our players for making mental mistakes. Mental mistakes, to me, are probably going to lose more football games. That means a lack of thinking, a lack of concentration, a lack of dedication. That's when I used to get on the players, and I still am very demanding in that respect with the youngsters that I deal with in Arizona Boys' Ranch.

PRY: Yeah. Now, when you were dismissed, you had spent 24 years of your coaching career at ASU. . . .

KUSH: Twenty-five. I was in my 25th year.

PRY: How did it feel?

KUSH: Well, it was a shock originally because, you know, I had opportunities to go and coach other colleges. I had opportunities to go and coach professional football.

PRY: You mean this is after the dismissal?

KUSH: Prior to the dismissal. And I stayed here because I felt I was part of the institution, I'd grown from a young man of 25, and end up 25 years. So I was part of the program. So yes, it was a shock to me, and certainly it was a shock to the family. Then after about two or three months, I'm sure I pinched myself once, I pinched myself many, many times. "Hey, this is a bad dream." But it really wasn't, it was a reality, and that was the end of it.

PRY: So I guess you got to practice what you preached as a coach -- namely, that when you encounter adversity, you bounce back from it.

KUSH: Yes. This is one issue that I felt that I acquired somewhere down along in my many years with the family back in Pennsylvania, or my tenure at Michigan State, or say my two years in the infantry, military -- that you learn how to face adversity, you learn how to bounce back. You learn how to overcome anything that is uncomfortable -- not by avoiding it, by confronting it on what I call a realistic issue and resolving the problem. And that certainly helped me out after I got over the emotional shock, which I'm sure was months, to overcome.

PRY: Yeah. Now, there was a lot of fan support for you here, though, so it wasn't.
...

KUSH: Well, now, yeah, there was. We were winning, and of course when you're winning, they all love ya'. (chuckles) One of the factors that I thought really made our program successful was the fan support. We had a horrendous amount of support from the community -- whether it was local, or say outlying areas. And of course because the Sun Angel Club, the Sun Devil Club, we perpetuated that type of thinking. The only game in town at that time was Sun Devil football.

PRY: Yeah. So what did you then do? You went on to coach in the pros. Did you do that immediately? Did you take a year off?

KUSH: No, I did a number of things. First of all, I did some work for a friend, Bob Walker, that made metal detectors. I worked for him for about five or six months. Then I did television work for about five months for Channel 10.

PRY: Doing a sports commentary?

KUSH: Yes, sports commentary. And you talk about an individual being out of his element! (laughter) I was really out of it.

PRY: Why was that?

KUSH: Well, I wasn't comfortable. I wasn't comfortable, and the preparation was a lot more than I thought. I learned how to type and learned how to do my own copy, et cetera and everything else. I mean, you're talking about being thrown into the fire and hoping you come out not burnt too heavily. But that was an adventure. Then my next move was to go to Canada. I had received an opportunity to go coach the Hamilton Tigercats. Believe me, I accepted the job. I didn't even see Hamilton -- it could have been in Timbuktu (chuckles) as far as I was concerned!

PRY: Now, before you tell me about that, I have to ask you, were you thinking for a while that you were going to get out of coaching? Is that why you were doing the other things? Or did you just want to take a breather?

KUSH: No, no, no. The reason I was doing those other things, I'm one of those individuals that security is a very key element in my life, and I didn't have a job, even though I was being paid. You know, I had a family to support, and so I was more concerned about where was the next paycheck coming from, in contrast to, hey, sit out and wait and casually look for another job. (PRY: Sure.) I'm one of those individuals that I want it done yesterday, not today. And so that was why I'd taken those other jobs.

PRY: So those are the opportunities that came up, and you. . . .

KUSH: Yeah, and I just grabbed 'em, right, because I didn't think I was in a position to sit back and say, "Hey, I'm gonna wait for a pro team to come by, or another college team." So I did have, as I said, the TV thing was certainly (chuckles) an adventure. As I said, I was fortunate, and I'll be forever grateful to the Canadian people for givin' me a job.

PRY: Uh-huh. So then you headed up to the CFL and you coached the Hamilton team there.

KUSH: Yes.

PRY: Going to the pros must have been a big change from coaching college.

KUSH: It was a shocker to me. Fortunately I went into a good situation in Hamilton, because the general manager, Ralph Zazho, was very close and he helped me out. In addition to that, one of our former players, Joe Zuger, was the assistant general manager. Joe is a former Sun Devil, and he'd played in Canadian ball, so he gave me a lot of advice. And then I was wise enough to hire some Canadian coaches that had experience there. So that was very beneficial. And then we had some outstanding players. We ended up 11-4-1 the first year. We had Tommy Clements, a real outstanding quarterback, who presently is

coaching at Notre Dame. He was the key to our success, and we were very fortunate. We missed going to the Gray Cups by one point. And of course we had won the Eastern Division, and we kind of got mentally complacent and lost the ball game. But, then I went on to the Baltimore Colts. (PRY: Right.) That was another shock and adventure, because I had a image of the Baltimore Colts of the [Johnny] Unitas era and the winning, et cetera and everything else, and it was not that way. Of course, that's why they're looking for coaches.

PRY: Did they move to Indianapolis while you were there?

KUSH: Yeah, while I was there. Yeah, we could talk about that. So I went to Baltimore, and I was really disappointed in the attitude of the players, principally because they'd lost so many ball games and they weren't really dedicated. So we turned it around, and we were there for another year. And then we made the "Mayflower Midnight Move" from Baltimore to Indianapolis. And when I say midnight move, that's when it all happened. Mr. _____, the owner, he had to move economically. Things were really at a low point in Baltimore. The steel industry was down, the auto industry was down, the shipping industry was down, and of course, the football team was down, the attendance was down, so it was an economic move for him, which you could justify it at that period of time, because the support was no longer there in Baltimore as it'd been in the previous years. I felt disappointed for the Baltimore fans, because they were excellent fans, and they still continued to follow the team that they have in the Canadian Football League. We did scamper out late at night, and it's always remembered as the Mayflower Midnight Move. We kid around about it, but that's actually the way it happened.

PRY: Now, how many years did you coach the Tigercats in Hamilton?

KUSH: I was just there one year.

PRY: And then you went to the Colts, and you were there. . . .

KUSH: I went to the Colts. I was there for three years. And then I came to USFL, coached the Arizona Outlaws.

PRY: And how long did you do that?

KUSH: I had a five-year personal service contract, and the league only lasted two more years.

PRY: So what did you do after the league folded?

KUSH: Well, after the league folded, I had that personal service contract, and I did some public relations work for Bob Walker, Turf Paradise. Bob was a personal friend of mine that I worked for earlier. He had bought Turf Paradise,

and he asked me to get involved with him, which I did. And I got involved in public relations, and I was with him for about, oh, I'd say eight, nine months, and then I'd taken the job at Arizona Boys' Ranch.

PRY: Yeah, so the Outlaws was your last coaching?

KUSH: Coaching job, yes.

PRY: Do you miss it sometimes?

KUSH: No, no. One thing I've learned over the years, Mark, is whatever you're doing, enjoy it, and get involved in a positive way, and good things will happen.

PRY: Well, you know, I asked you that because you read all the time about retired players AND retired coaches: they get away from the game, and then after a while they want to be back in it.

KUSH: Yeah, I see it. I see guys that are back into it, and they're in their sixties. I feel that one must know himself how intense you're going to be. (PRY: Right.) Do you want to continue to do that? Coaching football is very demanding -- especially at the professional level. It's even more so demanding. They're both demanding, even at the high school level -- don't get me wrong. But there's so many factors that you DO NOT have control of at the professional level. I'm talking about players' salaries, I'm talking about control of the team. So it is a very difficult task, psychologically. You're gonna put in hours and hours and hours, and it's never-ending. And college football, to a certain degree, is very similar, but it's more diversity -- the recruiting, the public relations, the involvement with the athletes which you don't get involved in professional football as intimately as you did at the college or high school level.

PRY: Do I hear you saying, in essence, that you liked coaching college ranks more than pro?

KUSH: Yes. The reason I enjoyed it more, you're more intimate with the players, you're going to be more involved with the youngster from the standpoint of his future development. I'm talking about academically, socially, and athletically. Where professional football, it's strictly athletics.

PRY: It's just strictly a business, too, right, at that point?

KUSH: It's a business, that's right. It's a business, and the tradition isn't there, the loyalty isn't there, and it's even worse now because of free agency and the salary cap. So players will jump from one ball club to another. You don't get attached to 'em and they don't get attached to you, as you would at the college or high school level.

PRY: Plus the teams move around these days, too.

KUSH: The teams move also, exactly! (laughter) I was part of that movement.

PRY: Yeah. Well, that was actually one of the FIRST of the moves like that to take place. I mean, there had been moves before. . . .

KUSH: Yes, but that was the first major move. I believe that opened that door for the move of the St. Louis Cardinals to come to Phoenix. I'm sure you've seen the same thing with the Raiders going back up to Oakland, and possibly somebody from L.A. going to St. Louis. So it really has opened the door. Principally, it comes down to economics again, and if they're not making the money, then that's their reason for leaving.

PRY: Now, the game of football, at every level, has changed tremendously since you were a player at Michigan State. When you look back on this time, what are your feelings about how football has changed?

KUSH: Well, I still feel that the basics -- the tackling, the blocking, the techniques, I'm talking about throwing the ball -- THEY have not changed at all. (PRY: Right.) I feel what has probably changed, and more so than anything else, is the media. I'm talking about the media hype about sports. There's more publicity, more recognition, more money involved in it. The money aspect of it, say, like the attendance at Arizona State, it's such a significant factor that you'd better win. And winning is the utmost now for revenue factors. Previously, you went into it, it was what I would call nonprofessionalism, a sport where everybody went into it with the attitude of, you know, you were going to play the sport and do the best job you can. But today, it's "win at all costs." And I think the attitude has changed dramatically, and that emphasis goes down to the high school level, and the same way at the college level. You know, you'd better win in order to have the attendance, in order to have the revenue, in order to receive the recognition. In my opinion, it's gone from reading and writing and arithmetic to recruiting, revenue, and recognition. (PRY: Uh-huh.) And the professional certainly has to be the revenue and recognition.

PRY: Yeah. Well, locally, what do you. . . . That must have some impact on the relationship of ASU to the local community, don't you think?

KUSH: Yes. The closer the institution is to the community, the more support you're going to have, the more youngsters you're going to have from in-state that are going to come to your institution. I think that has changed dramatically. We did recruit extensively out-of-state, but we recruited in-state as our primary recruiting resource. This has changed over the years. And again, because of the demand to win, demand to bring in the big dollars, so you're going to go out and try to get the high-profile guys. They may not be any better, but they probably have more recognition than the local guy. That's what it's all about, is the

recognition and the monetary segment of it.

PRY: But when they actually start to play the game, though, is it still the same?

KUSH: Still the same. It's still blocking and tackling. You get pre-game jitters, all of the game preparation. Once the whistle blows and the kick-off, and then you relax and you play the game like you normally would. That has not changed at all. Some things have changed, maybe some of the rules have changed, like pass blocking. And the players, yes, they've got bigger, but it is parity -- the opposing teams are equally as big. I see, as I said, the major dramatic change has been the recognition.

PRY: Now, you still see, from time-to-time, mention in the press of your name in connection with the success of ASU football. And people still refer to you as sort of "the man who made ASU football program what it is, and brought it its first success." How do you feel about that? Do you feel proud of your accomplishments?

KUSH: Well, probably the greatest gratification that I have ever received is when you recruit a youngster and you bring him into the program and they have success. The individual has success, then you're going to have success as a team, the institution is going to have success. Being there 25 years, going through all the different eras, the Border Conference, the WAC Conference, the PAC-Ten -- yes, I was part of it. I belonged to that institution, I was part of it. And those youngsters that played there were the same way, and yet I wanted them to BE successful. If they are successful, then the program is successful. That grows on you, so you become, as we used to say at Michigan State, you become a Spartan. Well, at Arizona State, you become a Sun Devil. And that's what it's all about, that's the tradition, the loyalty. . . .

PRY: It's a tradition, then.

KUSH: Tradition, the loyalty, the togetherness. That is very significant in the program, because the tradition, youngsters are going to come back, they're going to send their children to the institution, and that's what it's all about in my opinion -- it's a family relationship.

PRY: Yeah. Now, it must happen every once in a while when you're out and about, and somebody comes up to you and says, "Frank, you know, if only you were coaching the Sun Devils. . . ." (Kush chuckles) I'm sure this happens to you. "Why, we'd just be winnin' away!" What do you say to someone?

KUSH: Well, that's natural, because we did win, we won a horrendous number of games, and so they remember that aspect of it. The games were exciting, the players were exciting, we had outstanding individuals. So it's the older people that remember. Some of the other ones that I'm introduced to, they say, "Frank

Who?" so that's the other side of the coin.

PRY: Yeah. Looking back on your career, you've talked a lot about how football gave you an opportunity to go to college and to get an education. In general terms, what has football meant to you personally?

KUSH: The things that you talk about, football to me is an activity, a sport, that gave me the opportunity to be what I am today, from the standpoint of getting out of the so-called indigent environment, getting an education, exposing myself to different types of people, different countries where I've had an opportunity to travel, different parts of our own nation, the various ethnic groups and cultures that you get to meet because of the recruiting part of it and everything else -- everything that I am today, to a certain degree, is attributed to football. And the success I've had, and my youngsters having an opportunity to go on to get their degrees, and me being involved with other people presently, and giving back TO those young people -- and I'll be forever grateful TO the game of football because of the opportunities it has given me. And I feel the same way, that if I can do anything to help young people -- and it's not only young people in athletics -- help young people, period, because a lot of people helped me, and I learned that in athletics. They don't necessarily have to be athletes, but the people in the community that cherish the attributes that one acquires from participating in athletic activities. And I feel it's definitely a carry-over into other segments of our life, whether it's the medical field, or whether it's the education field, it's caring about people, and seeing people be successful and helping people out.

PRY: Is there anything that we haven't talked about that comes to mind in connection with your career at ASU?

KUSH: No. It was a great career, it was an adventure. I would say that it was probably as enjoyable of a career as one can have, being at one institution for 25 years, meeting so many great people, and dealing with being involved with so many youngsters, and being part of their future, and helping them pave the way for a successful career. That, to me, is what it's all about. That's what I'll remember about ASU.

PRY: Yeah. Well, thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate your cooperation.

KUSH: Okay, a pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW