

Reflections from WT - Buff Basketball's Ryan Quaid and Lady Buff Track and Field's Fatim Affessi

Randy Ray: Welcome to episode number eight of Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. I am your host, Randy Ray. I'm also the director of broadcast engineering on the campus and I am honored to be sitting here with the 11th president of West Texas A&M, Dr. Walter Wendler. Good morning.

Dr. Wendler: Randy, good morning. How are you today?

Randy Ray: I'm good. I mentioned that you were the 11th president and it made me think about some of the other presidents that I've served under. One of them is Dr. Russell Long and I want to talk a little bit about Russell Long Boulevard. What's going on there?

Dr. Wendler: Good for you. Russell Long Boulevard is becoming the core, the nucleus of West Texas A&M University. It used to be the northern boundary but now it is becoming more of the center of the campus as we undertake construction projects out there. Of course, everybody knows about the football stadium, and it's moving along very nicely. I believe it's still ahead of schedule.

Randy Ray: Wow, that's unusual.

Dr. Wendler: It is unusual, very unusual but the weather hadn't been good for growing crops, but it's been very good for making buildings because there's been no rain. On top of that of course the ag, they're the pulling the College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences is completed and up and running and it's a beautiful facility. Two more new facilities are under construction. The VERO Center, the Veterinary Education Research and Outreach Center, also on Russell Long and lastly, the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab is under construction. There's a lot going on and we have renovated Jarrett Hall, it'll be ready in the fall. It's essentially complete right now and on top of that, we have some storm water work that's being done.

There's been a persistent problem of flooding out actually in front of Jarrett Hall, that's going to be gone. We're doing a major work of drainage, it's not a very luxurious thing to think about. It's not very appealing to people, but it needs to work. We're getting that underway and lastly, there'll be this pedestrian link that will bring people from the First United Bank Center all the up to the county courts and the county office buildings in the old Walmart. Some people would know it as the old Walmart, but that will all be connected with a pedestrian walkway.

Randy Ray: That's going to be Russell Long Boulevard, all the way down.

Dr. Wendler: All the, yes, and maybe an important part of all this is you know, that now is under the stewardship of the Texas Department of Transportation. That's their

road, but that road is being transferred to the city of Canyon and they're going to work with us to make it a more campus-friendly street. We're going to do what they call put it on a road diet, we're going to narrow it down a little bit, we'll have bike lanes in both directions, there'll be service vehicle lanes in both directions. The pedestrian traffic will feel much more secure on that road because the speed limits will be dropped. You know, that really is an exciting-

Randy Ray: Is there a timeline for that? Give us a timeline.

Dr. Wendler: It's all going to be done before September 7th.

Randy Ray: Really?

Dr. Wendler: Yes, when Coach Hughes wins his first home football game in West Texas A&M University. First time in 60 years we're playing on campus, it's a big day. We're planning every day. There's a committee of 30 people that are trying to figure out how the parking's going to work, how the tailgating's going to work and we're honing in on all that. Of course, our athletic director Michael McBroom is working diligently with it so it's moving along and it is exciting, yeah.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I'm excited about that. I'm excited about the fact that people will actually get to come to campus. I think a lot of people in the past have gone to WT games and they don't have a clue what our campus looks like. We have a beautiful campus.

Dr. Wendler: No, you're absolutely right. Part of the problem is if three or four thousand people drive down for a home football game in the old days, they'd go over to Kimbrough, which is a great stadium with a tremendous tradition associated with it and it's going to serve the Canyon Independent School District I think very well, but they go to that facility and then they turn around and drive back to Amarillo and they don't get on the campus. Now, not only will they be on the campus, they'll be at the epicenter of the campus. They'll be right in the middle of it and I think that's going to be a powerful recruiting tool.

We also have some high school games that are already scheduled there for the fall, which I think will be good. Then we're working to getting the UIL, some UIL contests there. I think it's going to be tremendous and I think-

Randy Ray: Yeah, I think one of the things that we're going to do is for the radio station on campus, we're going to do tailgate radio all day of the game day, and so it's just going to be music that has to do with football, and fun, and college so that's going to be fun.

Dr. Wendler: That'll be good. Yeah, that'll be good, I hope you play some Beach Boys. I think I'm the only one that likes the Beach Boys.

Randy Ray: Yeah, we'll sneak it in there- Dr. Wendler yesterday, I picked up the paper and you were on the cover talking about something that's really cool. Tell me about the new WT Principal Scholarship.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, you know one of the things I found when I visited all these high schools in the Texas panhandle, I visited every one, 66 high schools, was the variety of the schools and also the smallness of some of them. There are school districts that have pre-kindergarten through 12th grade that have 100 students in them. All 13 grades.

Randy Ray: Total, yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Total, so they're small and the principals have a different relationship to the students and the families. They know the students and the families. If they'd been there for any length of time, a principal in Channing told me he's been in the household of every student that attends the school. Can you imagine a superintendent in Houston in an independent school district doing that with 85,000 students?

Randy Ray: No.

Dr. Wendler: These people know the families, so what we did was we said look, we're going to give you the opportunity to and this is shorthand, but we're going to give you the opportunity to give us the names of five students who you believe would be successful at WT. Here are the normal metrics, what we expect from class rank and test scores and all that sort of thing, but use your judgment and give us the names of people that you believe because you know them, would be successful at West Texas A&M University. By the way, three quarters of the principals have graduated, have at least one degree from West Texas A&M University, so they know their schools, they know their families plus, they know the institution that they're sending people to.

I've received a lot of very nice emails and letters about all this. The students that they recommend are automatically admitted. They don't have to pay an application fee, and they will be considered for every scholarship that we have. All of this is done solely on the word of the principal because we trust them and we believe they, most of them trust us. I mean we're working hard to try to serve these communities, so that's the new program. I got such a positive response from it, Randy, that I decided to go to all the 1A and 2A schools in the state of Texas about 340 and make the same offer. Now we're starting to get responses from them. They're sending us the names of future students because again, these are in smaller communities and the principals know the kids, know the families. They know the teachers and they can understand much better than we can actually what their propensity to do well in college is they actually can make better admissions decisions than we can make.

If a youngster is in the top 2% of their class and they've got some astronomical ACT or SAT score, it doesn't take a genius to know that they'll in all likelihood do well in college. We're looking for those that are good students but may not shine quite as brightly as some of those that have distinguished themselves with an academic career in high school.

Randy Ray: Wasn't that featured in a magazine that we're doing that?

Dr. Wendler: Well, it is been a couple things. Jon Mark Beilue wrote a piece on it called High Five recently and I think it was in the Amarillo Globe News. I've gotten a lot of commentary on it, people said, "Gosh, that's a nice story about this program."

Randy Ray: He's doing a great job.

Dr. Wendler: Yes he is. I am so thankful because people in the panhandle trust him. They know him and it's probably the best decision I've made since I've been here was to engage him and encourage him to help us tell the good words about WT. We're excited about him, but there was a national magazine AASCU, which is the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and they represent not typically flagships or land grant universities but universities like WT and they published a piece on our outreach to rural communities, which I'm very excited about.

Randy Ray: Yeah, that's really good. A lot of exciting things going on on campus, and we're going to talk about some exciting things that are going on in athletics and we're going to talk to a couple student athletes and I'm really excited about getting them here and talking to them about just what it's like to be a student athlete.

Dr. Wendler: I think that's great and I will tell you, these two that we're going to talk to are great student athletes. In my book always first because they're great students but they're also great athletes. They've got the records to prove it on both scores.

Randy Ray: I'm excited for them. Yeah, you've got that right. We'll be back right after this.

Speaker 3: West Texas A&M University is a student body that learns by doing and is always seeking opportunity, talented, and accomplished faculty that teach both in and out of the classroom. Programs that provide timeless information and meet the challenges of today's world. Facilities rich in technology as well as WT history. Now is the time to strengthen connections and open doors for tomorrow's leaders. Share your experience. Share your heritage. Share your pride.

Randy Ray: All right, welcome back to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of Texas panhandle. I am joined by a couple of really fantastic students and fantastic student athletes. I'm joined by Ryan Quaid and Fatim Affessi. Welcome to both of you. Welcome to Reflections from WT.

Fatim Affessi: Thank you.

Randy Ray: Ryan, tell me a little bit about, well, let's let the ladies go first. Fatim, tell me, you're from Switzerland?

Fatim Affessi: Yes, that's right.

Randy Ray: What brought you to WT?

Fatim Affessi: Okay, so I got recruited by Coach Flower and so we had a Skype and I just really liked the school, the track team, and so I came.

Randy Ray: I'm guessing that there's a lot of difference culturally between Switzerland and the Texas panhandle, right?

Fatim Affessi: Yes.

Randy Ray: What did you have to get used to more than anything else? Was it the food? Was it the people? What was it?

Fatim Affessi: I think it was mostly the food, because it was really different.

Randy Ray: Barbecue, right? You had to get used to all the barbecue.

Fatim Affessi: Yes. It was more about meat and also the culture, I think some people are more open than Swiss people actually. I don't know, when I walk on the street, people say hi to me and I was not used to so at the beginning I was like do I know them? Yeah.

Randy Ray: Yeah, so you were at home, you say they really like meat and they're really friendly, right?

Fatim Affessi: Yeah.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Tell me about what you do with the track and field team.

Fatim Affessi: Well, I do, so I'm a jumper. That's what you want to know?

Randy Ray: Yes.

Fatim Affessi: Oh okay, so I do long jump and triple jump and that's it.

Randy Ray: This last weekend was a really good weekend for you, wasn't it?

Fatim Affessi: Yes, it was all right. I'm very difficult with myself so for me just all right. I always want to win, I always want to be the first one. I'm very competitive so hopefully it will be even better for my other competitions.

Randy Ray: From what I understand, you are second in the nation right now.

Fatim Affessi: Yes.

Randy Ray: That's pretty impressive, very impressive.

Fatim Affessi: Yes, actually I'm second in the triple jump and I'm number one in the long jump.

Randy Ray: Wow. Fatim, how does being a student athlete, is that difficult when it comes to academics? Balancing between athletics and academics, how's that?

Fatim Affessi: Okay, yeah, I'm not going to lie, sometimes it's quite tough but I got used to it and the teachers are very comprehensive and they really help me also to balance both academically, academic sorry and athletics.

Randy Ray: Yeah, what's your major?

Fatim Affessi: I'm a psych major.

Randy Ray: Wow. Well, that's really impressive. Ryan, I'm going to ask you the same thing. How tough is it to balance academics and athletics?

Ryan Quaid: Yeah, it can be very tough, very tough. Especially as with track, basketball is a very long season and it spans many months. It can be very difficult, but I'll kind of echo what she said, the professors do a great job of working with you here at West Texas A&M. I've had great experiences with all my professors, and I'm thankful that they're very flexible and very understanding of the schedules that we have and the responsibilities that we have but yeah, it can be very difficult.

Randy Ray: So you're from Colorado.

Ryan Quaid: Yes.

Randy Ray: I'm guessing that there's a little bit of a culture shock for you too, maybe not as much as Switzerland but-

Ryan Quaid: Yeah, I don't think as much but yeah, definitely. A change from a little bit of a bigger town to a smaller town. Canyon is significantly smaller than where I'm from. Yeah, definitely a little culture shock but you know, took me just about through my first year, halfway through my first year to really get used to it and it's embraced me and I've kind of embraced the small town and it's been great for me.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I'm going to ask you both, if someone were to ask you what the best thing about West Texas A&M is, what would you say?

Ryan Quaid: I got to say the people. I think the people here are so nice. They're so welcoming and friendly that's something, it's rare to find everywhere.

Randy Ray: And the meat too, right?

Ryan Quaid: Yeah, and the meat's not too bad, yeah.

Fatim Affessi: I would say the same also. Everyone is very nice. They're always congratulating me for my achievement even if I don't even know them, so yeah, it's really a nice community I think.

Randy Ray: I'm going to ask you both another question. Tell me what achievement you're most proud of when it comes to athletics. Ryan, go ahead.

Ryan Quaid: You want me to go? I think making it to the Final Four my junior year, I think that was something I'm most proud of being here athletically.

Fatim Affessi: Okay me, it will be in 2017 when I won the National Championships in long jump as a freshman. It was amazing.

Randy Ray: What advice would you guys give you other student athletes?

Ryan Quaid: I think some advice I'd give is just to talk to your upperclassmen on the team and ask for help in terms of what to do for classes and look to them for counsel on different things but also, to just embrace the small town, embrace the boosters, the fans, the people on campus that know you because whether you know it or not, a lot of people know who we are even though we don't really understand that and they look up to us and they look at us for example as kind of people on this campus that they can look up to. I think that'd be some advice I'd give.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Fatim Affessi: Okay me, it would be just to enjoy the moment and yeah, be the best you can, and that's it.

Randy Ray: Very good advice, enjoy the moment and be the best you can.

Dr. Wendler: Randy, I'd like to in a sense follow up on that question. One of the things that I think is important about student athletes is they become ambassadors for not just the sport, the things that you do athletically but for West Texas A&M University. Does that ever feel like a burden to you guys that wait a second, I have to be especially careful what I'll do because young people are looking up to me, my classmates look up to me, and they do. They do, when you have athletic accomplishment like any accomplishment, people will admire you for that. I think that's a burden to carry and to remember. Do you guys sense that?

Fatim Affessi: Okay, for me it's not really a burden because I don't know, track has just always been my life. I really like to, I'm really athletic, sorry, and no it's not a burden. Yeah, I just embrace it and I'm grateful that people look up to me and it's an honor.

Randy Ray: Yeah, it is an honor. Ryan, what do you think?

Ryan Quaid: Yeah, I agree. It's something that you, I think you can struggle with it early on, but as you mature through college, I think it becomes easier. I think we both probably been lucky to have mentors on the team as a freshman or as a sophomore to kind of show us the way and I think that says a lot about this university and who they bring in and the character of all the student athletes here.

Randy Ray: All right, well every episode of our podcast, I throw a curve ball and that's just a question that you may not have been prepared for and Dr. Wendler, I'm going to include you in on this. Education is important to all of us. What was your favorite grade in school? There's silence.

Ryan Quaid: I don't know, that's a tough one. It's got to be one of my accounting classes. Favorite just overall grade?

Randy Ray: Yeah, either class or grade.

Ryan Quaid: I'll say it's got to be, it will be Intermediate 2 when I finish that this semester but we'll go with Intermediate 1.

Randy Ray: Accounting?

Ryan Quaid: Yes. Yep, intermediate accounting, yeah. Tough classes.

Randy Ray: I wouldn't have guessed that. Fatim?

Fatim Affessi: Okay, me I'm not sure. Can you repeat the question please?

Randy Ray: Growing up, what was your favorite grade?

Fatim Affessi: Like favorite subject at school?

Randy Ray: Or you know like if you were first level, like first, second, third grade, did you have one of those?

Fatim Affessi: Okay, it's quite different back home, so I will say college level.

Randy Ray: What's your favorite classes in college?

Fatim Affessi: Oh, okay, so I'm a psych major but actually I really like science class.

Randy Ray: Science.

Fatim Affessi: Yeah.

Randy Ray: Oh. Dr. Wendler what was your favorite grade?

Dr. Wendler: This one's easy for me. I was an effective student but I was never a great student and I transferred from a community college in New York and went to Texas A&M, and the first semester I was there, I'd done very well, probably better than I'd ever done before but my second semester, I made straight A's and the dean's list so now I'm a junior in college and I called my dad and I said, "Dad, I made the dean's list," and his response was, "Which one?" That was my favorite grade, junior at Texas A&M University was my favorite grade.

Randy Ray: Well, I've said this before, and I'm not just saying this because I'm at work here but really, my favorite part of my education was coming to WT. I have said this before and I believe it, this is a life-changing place, you just got to let it change you and WT will do that. I'm not the same person that I was when I got there and all that so this is a fantastic place and I'm honored to be a part of it and I'm also honored to be a part of this podcast. Thank you for joining us and be sure to join us next time for Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. We'll see you next time.