

Thomas Rodriguez:

Hello everyone, and welcome back to the I Am WT podcast. My name is Thomas Rodriguez. Unfortunately, Micah could not join us for today's episode, and I'm joined by our coach here at WT, Tom Brown, better known as Coach Brown. How are you doing today?

Coach Tom Brown:

Thomas, I'm doing great. Thanks for having me on the podcast today. Looking forward to sharing a little bit about myself and our program.

Thomas Rodriguez:

I hear our basketball program here is really, really good.

Coach Tom Brown:

You know, the program is just like any program, you have some ups and downs, but this will be my 10th year, finishing up our 10th year here, Coach Gove and myself, and then the other coach on the staff is Coach David Chavlovich, who actually played here for four years for Coach Gove and I. Been here for 10 years and our program has been pretty solid. The last eight years, we've made the NCAA National Tournament, and had some really good runs, and had a good year this year.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Women's basketball has been kind of really... They go to championships or something every year, something like that?

Coach Tom Brown:

The women haven't been to the tournament the last year or two, but I'm with the men's team. The women have been fantastic, and Coach Prock does just a great job with them, and they've had some really good players throughout the year. And we did a little three-point shooting contest and involved some community members. Mike Bain was in it. We had a lot of fun this year doing different events like that.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Bain and Schaeffer, they sponsor a lot of our facilities here, the football stadium. Even our radio station, it wouldn't exist if they weren't helping us out, so we're always very grateful to our sponsors and everyone who supports us and all that.

Coach Tom Brown:

Thomas, there are so many great people in the community, and it's just amazing, the support that the WT has, and the support for all components of the university, not just athletics. But like you said, over here at the Sybil B. Harrington, and the theater, and the arts, and WT is a great place to be, and a lot of people with that have a lot of deep roots and commitment to the , and to the Panhandle, and of course to West Texas A&M University.

Thomas Rodriguez:

We get to meet quite a few people who are important figures within WT while doing this podcast, like I remember we got to meet the streets a couple episodes ago, and it was really fun to hear their experience and everything, because they sponsor us. They're the reason we have a truck and they're part of the reason we have a station and everything, but moving away from sponsors and basketball for just a little bit, let's

talk about you. Let's talk about you. How about you tell me where you grew up, how you got to WT, all that stuff?

Coach Tom Brown:

Sure. Growing up, I was the youngest of five children, and my mom is still alive. My dad has passed away, but I grew up in Woodbury, Minnesota, and had a great childhood. Again, I was youngest of five. I have two older brothers, two older sisters, and it was a great time growing up. And I'm a little bit older. I'm not going to give you my age, but I'm a little bit older, so I've seen a lot of different things, and the community that I grew up in was similar to Canyon. It was only a town of about 10,000. Now, it's a city of 50, 60,000 and it's a suburb just outside of Saint Paul, Minnesota.

After high school, I played all three sports, basketball, football, and baseball, and really enjoyed doing that. I wish more kids would do that. Just a side note on that, but it's just kind of the world changes at times. But after high school, went to Winona State, graduated Winona State, and then started getting into coaching right away. And at Winona State, I played baseball and basketball, and really enjoyed the coaching aspect. It was something that I was always kind of wanted to do. I knew I wanted to do that, even when I was in high school. Just really enjoyed being around the coaches that I had in all the sports.

And one of my football coaches was probably one of the biggest influences on me, as well as my basketball coach, and the baseball coaches too. I guess all three of them were huge influences on me and shaped who I am. But the whole background, a lot of people ask me that, "Well, who really influenced you?" The coaches definitely. But it was really my parents, my brothers, and my sisters. I lean on them for advice and it's something that you're always growing in anything that you do, whether you're in business, coaching, anything, and if you don't stop growing, you kind of die. And so I always still lean on them, even though my dad's not around, but lean on my mom a little bit, lean on my sisters and my brothers, and then other coaches that I've got to know throughout the years. And one of those is Coach Gove, really lean on him as well. And we've been together for 26 years.

But after college, was a decent basketball player. Baseball, I had one year, I was a "won and done". "Won and done", meaning I won and not very good, so that was it. But made the varsity team, we had good teams up there. Winona State baseball was very good back in the late '80s, early '90s. And side note there, coach Gove was an All American, I was not. He was a very good baseball player. And then the roles kind of flipped a little bit on basketball there. But after college, went back, stayed with Mom and Dad, tried to save that money. Great advice for the kids out there, if you can't buy something, don't charge it and rack up a big bill. That's kind of always been my motto: If I don't have it, I'm not going to go get it. And I think that has changed a little bit in today's day and age.

So I stayed at home, saved up money, and then I went over to Wisconsin and was at Gilmanston High School for four years as the athletic director, which, another side note, they need a new athletic director here at WT, so maybe Coach Brown steps into that role. I say that a little tongue in cheek, because I do not want to be the athletic director at WT. Too much work, and to be very straightforward, I really want to coach. That's my passion. And that's one thing too, I would say to anybody in college, high school, do what you're passionate about. Don't just do it for the money, don't just do it because maybe your mom or your dad told you to do that. Do something that you enjoy, because life goes by too fast. And now I'm sounding like the old guy on the podcast, but really do enjoy it, live life to the fullest, because you just never know.

But anyways, I'm at Gilmanston High School, really enjoy it, really enjoy the students, small, little country school and had some really good basketball teams there, and really enjoyed my time. It was really tough to leave, but had an opportunity to go coach at my alma mater, Winona State, and I did that for 16 years. We had some great teams. We won two national championships in men's basketball. We were runner up another year, won numerous conference titles, had All Americans, and have really established some great friendships through those years, and 16 years is a long time, and it was a lot of fun. I never thought I'd

leave, but things change, obviously. And when this job opened at WT, I applied and I met Dr. O'Brien and Michael McBroom, and those two guys were integral in hiring me to come to WT.

It was something that it was a tough decision, because that's all I really grew up was Minnesota, and being up there, and when I came down here, it was pretty cool. The facilities, the people down here were fantastic. One of my sisters, Sue, actually told me was, "If you can ever go south and have a little bit nicer winters than the Minnesota winters, do it." Climbing is one thing. I get down here and I say, "I wanted to come south," everybody laughs at me. "Our weather stinks down here." Well, you haven't really been to Minnesota. In the wintertime, in Minnesota, you're shoveling out snow, you're minus temperatures. It can be really tough up there, and everybody kind of, there's pros and cons. We do get a little wind down here. I don't know if you realize that, Thomas?

Thomas Rodriguez:

The weather is a little bit different. I'm used to a lot of rain, and up here, it's the exact opposite.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, down in Houston, where you're at, you're going to get some rain, and over here in the West Texas, we're going to get a light breeze once in a while. And so definitely, there's pros and cons both ways. But 16 years at Winona State, a couple national titles, and some great memories. Came down to WT, and I've been here for 10 years now, and it's been a lot of fun. It has gone by so fast, I just cannot believe it. My oldest son is a senior, his name is TJ. Then, Zack is my middle son, he's a junior. And then my daughter is my youngest child and she's a sophomore. And then, my wife is Dr. Brown, Dr. Trisha Brown, and she actually is a professor here in the sports management program, the SES department. So it's just been a great 10 years, and hoping I can do another 10 years.

Thomas Rodriguez:

There's a few parts I want to comment on. In your story, you were talking about administration versus coaching.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yes.

Thomas Rodriguez:

And I get that, because we get that same argument whenever we talk about teachers versus teaching and administration, because some people, they have that love for watching the students grow and some people, they like to be in charge of managing it all. Because I kind of get where you're coming from in that aspect, in that regard. Also, talking about sports, I can't say I'm too much of a sports guy. I was more of a band kid growing up. I did play baseball one year, but I got hit by more pitches than I hit. So I can't say that I was too good, but I do enjoy going to the games.

Mostly, I like playing from the sidelines. Band I think is a fun part of being in a kind of football game, football stadium and all that. So I can definitely say that I enjoy seeing sports and stuff from the sideline, that kind of thing. Can't say I've ever done pep band, because I know we get pep band that shows up to some of the basketball games every now and then, but I know that they have a lot of fun with it. They got a whole audition process and everything.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, definitely. We have a great pep band, and any sporting event you go to here on campus, whether it's football, volleyball, there's a great atmosphere and there's a great environment, and that's something that's

really cool at our level, at the Division Two level, to see that. And you don't see that at a lot of Division One schools, the smaller Division Ones, and so it's really fun. We had some great student involvement this year. Sedrick Knowlton did a great job of getting the students out. I think once those students come out and see how much fun it is, they're going to come back. It's kind of like anything you do, if you have fun doing it, you're going to come back. You go to a nice restaurant, you get great service and great food, "Hey, I'm going back."

Thomas Rodriguez:

Absolutely.

Coach Tom Brown:

It's the same thing here. Big thanks to our students that came out to our games this year, because we had some great crowds, and winning that regional this year was a lot of fun. And to have the students there celebrating with our players, it means a lot to our guys. It means a lot to the community, and it was just a lot of fun.

Thomas Rodriguez:

I know I had quite a few friends who went to those games, like the Fill the Box and all those kind of games, and talking about just the experience there, and how energetic and electrifying it is to be a part of that audience at that game. That's super important, and I wish I could have gone. I wasn't able to, unfortunately, but I can speak from other people's experience that, yeah, they had a great time, with that whole experience.

There was another thing that you were talking about that I want to talk about: the facilities. You were talking about how you came here and you were kind of surprised by like, "Oh, the facilities are really good." And I think that's something a lot of people don't understand is our school may be kind of out in the middle of nowhere to a lot of people, but that doesn't mean that we have bad facilities. We have great facilities here, I think.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, Thomas, and you touched on that earlier, too. And it takes community, it takes leadership in our administration, but then, it also takes some great community people. We have the First United Bank Center, Mike Bain, and Barbara Bain, and others are part of that. And without their support, we wouldn't have that. Now, it is full for graduation. They're setting up today and it's going to be occupied for the next month, it seems like. But when that gym is set up for basketball, it's a great place, as a men's basketball, I'm speaking for a men's basketball coach. When it's set up for graduation, it's awesome for graduation as well. And that's really what we're here. It's life in the balance and Division Two, that's why you go to college, university is to graduate, go on, and be successful.

And graduation's this Saturday, and it'll be set up, and then there's high school graduations that are in there as well. So it's First United Bank Center where we play is just fantastic. Bain-Schaeffer football stadium, awesome. The box is awesome. Schaeffer Park is fantastic. We have a lot of really good things, a lot of positives here on campus, and it takes great people in the community, as well as great administration, to get those, and to maintain those, and to keep going, and building it, and creating a place where students want to be a part of it. And, "Hey, that's my school. I'm WT and I'm proud to be there."

Thomas Rodriguez:

I love to see people who are proud of WT. I like to see just the kind of pride that students take in being at this school. It always feels to me, at least from my experience, being from big city to coming out here to

rural nowhere, I mean, that's how I thought it was, but it's not. There's a tight-knit community of great people here, and people love WT. It's its own thing, but it is still amazing, and it's really cool to see.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, there's no question about it. I don't know what else I can say about it, but there are just so many... There's great people, and there'll be people that'll move away, and then they'll come back. Dr. Cooper, Tyler Cooper, is Rick Cooper's son, and Rick Cooper was a basketball coach here for 20 years, and Rick is still involved, still comes to the games. I mean, he doesn't have to do that. He's awesome. And then, to coach basketball for 20 years and have your son be a doctor in the area, how proud is he? It's a great place, and it's something that so many good people, you can't name them all.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yeah, that's a great way to state it. I want to talk a little bit about your time as the head coach of the Buff basketball team. What are some ways you feel that the program has kind of grown and changed during your time here?

Coach Tom Brown:

It was tough starting out. We only had three seniors: Miles Gatewood, Tez Dumars, and Antoine Ball, and Antoine ended up going on playing for the Globetrotters. Tez graduated, he's in coaching. He's actually with one of the Division One women's teams right now, coaching, and then Miles, I believe is back out West. And so those three were great young men, but the team, they lost some players. They didn't have a lot of freshmen or sophomores. They had one freshman, and Rylan Gerber, and Rylan's still in coaching right now. He's at the high school level. And so we had to put together a whole new team. Got hired in late April, and at that time, there was no portal. I'm trying to build a team, so I'm trying to get a couple freshmen. You want to have some sophomores, juniors, and then those three seniors. And so we had a team of 11 or 12.

We had to red shirt one or two, and a red shirt means they don't play, but they're still on the team. And so we had a small team, literally and figuratively. I think our tallest guy was 6'2", and that was Antoine Ball. We had a lot of fun that year and I think that might've been one of our best coaching jobs. Coach Gove, Coach Henderson, who's now the Head Coach at St. Cloud State, and myself. And then, Dan Kratz was a volunteer coach, and we all came from Minnesota or Wisconsin. I was Minnesota, those three were Wisconsin, and I feel like we did a great job coaching that year. We finished up 17 and 12, and kind of laid the groundwork of what our expectations were and how we're going to run our program. And it was kind of interesting, because some people were saying, "Hey, you got to go get junior college kids," or, "You got to take this kid."

And I really wanted to try to take players that represented who I was and who I wanted to be around. And there's a lot of good junior college players, but I wasn't going to take anybody that had questionable grades or maybe had a questionable background, anything like that. I wanted kids that wanted to be here at WT, and I've always recruited that way: "Hey, if you don't want to be here, and whether you want to go play division one or you want to go play here at a different school, that's what you should do." I want guys that want to be at WT, represent who we are as a program, and then try to win a national title. And so that first year was tough. I'm not used to being 17 and 12, but we had a good team of players, we had a great group of guys. They played hard and they set a great foundation, a great framework.

From there, the second year, we went 21 games, then we won 26, and then I think we won 32, and we made it to the final four with David Chavlovich. Actually, we made it to the Sweet 16, our third year out in Golden Colorado. Then, the next year we made the final four going to Sioux Falls. AND David Chavlovich was a big part of that, Jordan Evans was a big part of that, and some other players. I can't mention everybody, but we've had so many great players throughout the year, and guys that still hit you

up tournament time, and, "Hey coach, good luck," and this and that. And so that's what it's about, and it's graduating student athletes and being as successful as we can.

We've been knocking on the door to win a national title. We've been very, very close. We lost to Ferris State. David's senior year, Ferris ended up winning it. We lost to Mankato last year. They ended up winning it, and lost in the final four. So we've been very close. We've had some great teams, a lot of great memories in that 10 years. The four Elite Eight appearances were just... It's a lot of fun to win an Elite Eight, because the crowd is usually there. When you go to the Elite Eight, it's usually in Evansville or Sioux Falls. Not everybody can get out there, so you don't have that environment. And so those regional final games are so much fun, and it's been a great run. The one year we were 32 and one, and COVID hit, and I really do, I really thought we were going to win the title that year. We beat another team that year, that was 32 and one.

So we hung one loss on them, and that was the team that Lincoln Memorial, their coach ended up going to Indiana State, and now he's at St. Louis, Josh Schertz is his name. And we beat those guys when they were 32 and one that year, and we could have saw him in the championship game out there. You just never know. Sometimes, the ball doesn't bounce your way, but we had a really good team. We already beat them once. I think we had a really good shot of winning it all, and that was with some really good players. Zack Toussaint was on that team, Eric Mosley, and some others. So it was a lot of fun. Again, so many great teams we've had in the past 10 years here at WT.

Thomas Rodriguez:

What do you think you're most proud of of your time here at WT?

Coach Tom Brown:

3.67.

Thomas Rodriguez:

You're going to have to explain to what that number means to me, I'm not a big sports guy.

Coach Tom Brown:

Okay. It is a big sports number, and that represents our GPA last semester.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Oh, that's really high.

Coach Tom Brown:

3.67.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yeah, I can't say, I can't brag on my GPA, but that's really cool. I mean, people I think have a stigma that athletes aren't exactly the smartest bunch, and I think that's not fair.

Coach Tom Brown:

It's not fair. And the toughest thing, Thomas, with a 3.67 is I don't know if we're ever going to beat that. So now, it kind of set us up to fail. No, our players did it, and they set themselves up, and we've got some really sharp young men that care about academics, and realize that, at some point in time, whether you go



play 10 years in the NBA, or you go overseas, or you do whatever, at some point in time, you're going to be done playing basketball, and you want to have your degree.

I've got three seniors this year that I'm really proud of: Rylan Holt, Larry Wise, and Zack Toussaint. Rylan already has his master's, Larry is very close, and Zack will need another year, but he'll finish up. He's coming back to help us out, so he'll finish up his master's as well. And that's what it's all about: You're coming to WT, you're going to get a great experience on the court. We're going to play some really high-level basketball, and I want you to graduate. And our guys did it exceptionally well with that 3.67. So I'm really, really proud of that, and our guys this last year.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yeah, they're putting my GPA to shame. I'm like, "These guys, they're the smart ones."

Coach Tom Brown:

Thomas, mine too. But again, great young men in our program right now, and now, we've got to try to get them to come back. We lost three seniors, we lost three guys to the portal, we lost another one to an injury. So half our team is gone for next year, so it's going to be tough, but we're going to regroup, and we've got three local players coming in that are really good. And so, hey, I don't care if you're a freshman, get ready to go. You're playing, and let's get after it.

Thomas Rodriguez:

That's awesome.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah.

Thomas Rodriguez:

We're going to take a quick break. We're going to be back with more from Coach Brown on the I Am WT podcast.

Speaker 3:

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Thomas Rodriguez:

Welcome back to the I Am WT podcast. I'm still Thomas Rodriguez and I'm still here with Coach Tom Brown of the basketball team. You and your staff have guided the buffs to five LSC regular season championships, six LSC Tournament Championships, eight consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances, and four NCAA Division Two Elite eight appearances. Tell us what that means to you as a coach.

Coach Tom Brown:

Wow, that's a lot. That's pretty cool. That means we have some really, really good assistant coaches and some really, really good players, and that we've been very consistent over time. I think a lot of teams can have a pop here and there, and you can have a good team. But the 10 years that we've been here, again, I give all the credit to our players, Coach Gove, Coach Chavlovich, and Coach Henderson have been the coaches that have really embodied the program and did all the tough work, recruiting things like that, and workouts, and really getting our guys ready to go and play. We've had other coaches, Dan Kratz has been

here, he's been a volunteer. Omar has been a volunteer for us as well. Gahimbare Derick has been with me for six years, Parker Nielsen was with us this year, and actually, coach Henderson is at St. Cloud right now as the head coach.

Omar Aguirre is one of his assistant coaches up here, and so he stole one of my guys. I'll get him back, though. But Coach Henderson actually comes back to play in the Tip-Off Tournament here. St. Cloud will be back down here, and I know a lot of people in the area really liked Coach Henderson when he was here, so we should have some good crowds for their games as well. He'll have a lot of support from the WT faithful, because we're not playing them. They're going to play Missouri Western and Lubbock Christian. We'll play Ferris State and North Carolina Pembroke. But Thomas, to go back, I'm someone that I really don't like the spotlight that much, but to name everybody, we've had so many great players. And I'll just start with this last year's team: Rylan Holt, Zack Toussaint, and Larry Wise were three guys that were really instrumental in leading our program. And then, Ahamed Mohammed was another guy who's going to be really big player for us next year, and he was just fantastic in the regional and at the Elite Eight.

And he's a guy, he's a leader, and he's coming back next year for us, and he's just a fantastic young man. He's around all summer. I'm just so proud to have him in our program. And we're building around him and others like Noah Pagotto, Harry Evans, Mackenzie Morgan, and I can go right down the list, but all those guys are coming back, and to list all the guys previously, it's just too long of a list, but they know who they are. And we've had All Americans, and like David Chavlovich, Ryan Quaid, and others. We've had some really special players, and that's what it takes: Some guys that are really committed to the program, that love the game, play together, and really enjoyed their time here at WT. And we've had guys that have moved on that have played Division One. Some guys have moved on and just been done with basketball, but the time that they're here, they've really committed. And I'm really proud of everybody that has been here in my 10 years at WT.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yeah, it sounds like it means a lot to them too. I would imagine it means a lot to them too, to be a part of this program and to get their experience. And even if they don't continue with basketball, your time with WT matters. And I think it's really important to emphasize that it does.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, there's no question about it. So we go to the National Association of Basketball Coaches Clinics every year, and it was in Phoenix this year. And when we were out there, we saw a couple of alumni out there, and then Eric Mosley came out for a night, and had a nice conversation with him, and he was on that team that was 32 and one. And Eric was actually, just a quick story about Eric, he actually played for us for three years, and Eric, you're going to get mad at me, but then he fell in love, and then he left, and he was going to go work, and so on and so forth. He didn't finish his degree, and then that didn't work out. And long story short, there was a gap year, but then we ended up getting Eric back, and then he finished his last two years with us, because he registered one year, he finished his last two years, got his degree, started working on his master's, and he's back in the Phoenix area right now, and he's loving life, and he's got a lot of stories from when he played here at WT.

And he came in just a skinny 6'5", 180-pound little twig. And when he left, he was a very, very good basketball player, and had a chance to play maybe professionally at a lower level, maybe in Australia or overseas. But he went into work and he's back in Phoenix now, but just having a relationship with him and having him come out and see us, and others have done that too. Back in Houston last year, Jordan Collins and Gotch Gotch was down there. So some great guys that still are connected to the program.

Thomas Rodriguez:



Speaking of people who have stories, I believe you had a story you wanted to tell on this podcast?

Coach Tom Brown:

Well, just a little bit about... We did a fundraiser this year, and it was a three-point contest, and it was something new, and I'm going, "How is this going to work and how do we do it?" And so we involved our team and we involved the community. We had some former players as well, Dr. Tyler Cooper and his wife Emily Brister, both in the Hall of Fame, came back, and they were great sports, and they participated. Lexy Hightower was in it from the girls' program, and she's one of the best WT girls basketball players to go through in a long time. And so we had this three-point shootout, and we just did it one minute, and we did it, it was like March Madness, except we only had 32 teams. We had 32 teams, and each player was their own team, and you just went head to head.

And so my kids were in it, Coach Gove's kids were in it. Coach Gove was actually nice enough to be in it, and I think he got bumped in the first round, I'm not sure by who, but I think he got bumped out pretty quick. Mike Bain was in it, Adam Bandy was in it. We had some of the News Channel 10 was in it, and Clint Brakebill, and some others. And so it was a lot of fun, and we raised some money for it. We're going to try to do that again. We might expand it to 64. I'm not sure if we can, time allowing, but we actually had a decent little crowd for it, and we had a lot of fun. And I couldn't believe it, it came down to two WT players and two very good shooters. And Zack Toussaint, anybody that knows men's basketball knows Zack Toussaint, he's made some big shots.

He beat out some other guys. Not sure who he beat out to get there, to the championships. And then, my daughter almost made it to the championship. She beat out David Chavlovich in one of the preliminary rounds, and she can shoot it. She made, I think, 18 in the round, and David struggled a little bit. I think he was a little tired, but he was a very good sport about it, and she advanced. And then, I think my daughter got beat by Lexy Hightower, who was, again, one of the best players to ever play at WT for the girls' program.

So it was Lexy Hightower against Zack Toussaint in the championship. Great matchup. Zack did end up prevailing, but it was a lot of fun. It's just fun to do different stuff like that. And we might do that again. We might do a little three-on-three tournament, but we've had some great players go through. And again, I don't know if anybody can beat Zack's mark, because I think he made like 35 three-point shots in 60 seconds.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Wow.

Coach Tom Brown:

That's hard to get 35 shots up in 60 seconds, but he was lights out, and it was a lot of fun. We raised a little money for the program and it was a pretty cool event. So thanks for letting me share that.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yeah, I know these community events mean a lot to everyone involved with them, and our community here at WT and all that, so it's really awesome to hear about the events that are happening, and how they kind of went down, and all that kind of stuff. It is just an interesting story to be told and to hear, I think.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, and I think former players, too, love to get back out on the court, whether it's an alumni game or it's something like that. And I'll tell you, there was a lot of pressure, because everybody wants to do well in those. Some people I guess might not care too much, but there's a little pride on the line. And I didn't

think Adam Bandy would even make a shot. I mean, he's always lifting, and he's just too big, he's too strong. But he actually, I think, made seven shots. He really impressed me, to say the least. But my expectations were kind of low. I underestimated him, I guess. But it was fun to have Adam in, Mike Bain got in there from First United Bank too, as well. So it was great to have people come out, and support us, and be involved in that.

Thomas Rodriguez:

We're talking about events, let's talk a little bit about your off season: What does that look like for you? How are you preparing for the next season?

Coach Tom Brown:

Off season right now has gotten tougher, because more kids with the portal now, and the NCAA rules, you can leave after a year. And so there's been a lot more players jumping around, and that happens at every school. So now, it's not only just recruiting players to come in for next year, but also recruiting the players that you have on your team. "Hey, we'd love to have you come back." And some players, we had three graduate, we have three in the portal, and they're looking at different schools, and it's for different reasons. Some want to play more, some want to be closer to home, whatever their reason is. And so recruiting is big in the off season. I'm still working on trying to get a schedule set. We've gotten to kind of a level, Thomas, where not everybody wants to play us.

And so the better teams will play us. Now, you got to find those teams where the dates match up, and we'll find games, and there's people out there, but it's just scheduling is tough, recruiting has become tough. And then, at any program, fundraising is huge. And so we're going to get after it, fundraising, and trying to generate our program. We're looking at adding different things. We'd like to get some new lockers for the locker room, we'd like to do this, like to do that. And everything costs money. And so at our level, you've got to be very conservative. You've got to watch where your dollars go, and then you've got to try to raise some more money as well. But it's something that NCAA, we can't do anything with our players. They can get into the weight room, they can work with our strength coach, they can get into the First United Bank Center when it's open, but we can't do anything with them.

And that had to stop one week before finals. And so we finished up a week and a half, two weeks ago now, and our guys, it's up to them, and those are the players you want to recruit. You want to recruit the ones that, "Hey, I'm going to take some time off, but I'm going to really battle this summer. I'm going to push myself, because I want to represent WT, and I know how good we were last year, but I want to even go a step further."

And so the guys that are coming back, that's what they're doing this summer. We have four Aussies on our team, so they're back in Australia. They're mostly from the Sydney area. They'll go back, and they've got their program that they have to do, but then when early August hits, they'll come back, middle of August, they'll come back, get back here, and then we'll start up four days into school, and we'll be right back at it.

And so again, Division Two, our motto, "Life in the balance," and I really do, I think you need some time off, and it's something that you don't want to get burned out. You've got to have that balance. If you're just all about basketball, I don't know if I want you on our team. I want you to have some other interests outside of basketball, as well. And it's really important for me to have those guys understand that when they come in. Don't get me wrong, I'm as competitive as anybody, but we want to have fun, and we want to do it the right way, and the right way is having that balance with family, school, and basketball. To me, that's what it is. Number one thing should always be family, school should be second, and basketball is right there, a close third, but you got to have that balance in your life.

Thomas Rodriguez:

You've given a lot of advice today to students, and your staff, and all that. If you could give one more piece of advice to students today, what would you give them?

Coach Tom Brown:

I would say have as much fun as you can, I really would. It's something where, get out and challenge yourself. Laugh at yourself, have fun. I know you got to sit in some classes here and there, but even when you're in a class, and I tell my kids this too, is make the most of it. Enjoy yourself, have fun, because it's going to go by really fast. And if you have a smile on your face, naturally, other people are going to smile back at you, but enjoy yourself. And if that means going to work out, some people love to work out, but that's something that's really important. If you enjoy being with family, be with your family. If you enjoy going to the side poodles, go to the side poodles. If you enjoy golfing, go golfing. Do what you want to do, because life goes by so fast, and you never get it back. So live it up while you can, that's my advice.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yeah, I get that a lot. Finding things that you like to do: My thing here is I love doing the radio station. I have a special show that I like to do, and I love it so much that I'm picking up morning show next semester, and I'm going to be kind of like the voice for those mornings, and people on their commute here, and all that stuff. And that's fun for me. And everyone has something. I mean, maybe it's band, maybe it's sports, maybe it's exercise. You just got to find your thing, I think.

Coach Tom Brown:

You got to find your niche and then go with it. And when you do find that niche, you're going to find out, you're going to excel, and you're going to do really well. And that might change. You might find that, "Hey, I really want to go down this path," but then, all of a sudden, you change. That's okay. There's a player that I thought was going to be here for four years. He left after one year, and that's okay. You know, he's got to do what's best for him. And there's no hard feelings, there's nothing. You've got it, and that's what I go back to, Thomas, is you got to find the players that want to be at WT, that want to excel, and want to be here. And that's so important to me, because I don't care if we go 500 next year. I want to be around guys that I want to be around and have fun. We're not going 500, though, Thomas. We're going to go after it. We want to win that title and we're going to go after it.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Got to go all the way.

Coach Tom Brown:

Let's do it.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yes.

Coach Tom Brown:

We've been knocking on the door, somebody's got to let us in one of these days. And we have so many good teams here, from our softball, baseball. There's just so many good teams, and it's fun going out to support them. It's fun to see all of the excitement. I went to a softball game the other day, and all the excitement. I haven't been to a softball game lately, because we've been busy. Then, I was out recruiting. I was out of the country.

And so it's tough to get to everything, but I'm going, "Oh, my gosh, this is awesome." And if I'm a softball player, I want to come to WT. They've got a great environment, and people really care about it. It's awesome. And again, a selfless plug, but Schaeffer Park, come on out, watch the Buffs play, lady Buffs play some great baseball, some great softball action just around the corner. And if you can't get to the game, you can always watch it online.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Oh, yeah. Definitely attend games whenever possible. So you've spent a lot of time here at WT, what's your favorite memory?

Coach Tom Brown:

Favorite memory of WT... There's a lot of them. There really is. I mean, it's probably, and it's something I'm going to rip on myself right now, and I'll do it because Coach Gove and I have a great relationship, and he'll poke me a little bit, and I've got a lot of stories on him, but I'm not going to go after him right now. But there was a player named Tommy Gove, and that was his nephew. And we had him down for a visit, and he was our first visit going around campus. So I'm like a parrot. I'm reading off the signs, "Hey, there's Sybil, B. Harrington, that's music, theater, arts are over there. Here's the box." And we go, and we're going over by the dining hall, but the G came off the dining hall, and I don't even know what it is. It's a whirlwind.

And he's our first visit and I'm going, "And there's Dinin Hall," and I called it "Dinin Hall", because the G wasn't there. So I am basically, I was Anchorman. I was Anchorman, just reading right off the prop, what it was, and I stuck my foot in my mouth, and I think it's pretty funny. And that's what I go back to, hey, laugh at yourself, because you're going to make mistakes. And if I can't laugh at that, then I'm in trouble, because he's going to tell that story to recruits when they come in. But it's just fun, and you got to be able to enjoy it. And I'll never forget that either, I won't make that mistake again. But it's kind of a fun story. And again, you got to be able to make fun of yourself a little bit and laugh at yourself.

Thomas Rodriguez:

I think I'm going to start calling it the "Dinin Hall" as well.

Coach Tom Brown:

If you call it "Dinin Hall" and get that changed, I want credit.

Thomas Rodriguez:

I'm going to make it a... Yeah, coin the phrase, Coach Brown, 2024.

Coach Tom Brown:

"Coach Brown's Dinin Hall"-

Thomas Rodriguez:

We can call it that.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, that'd be pretty good.

Thomas Rodriguez:

You got questions that you want me to ask? The big one? All right. It's time for the big one.

Coach Tom Brown:

Oh, boy, my favorite color?

Thomas Rodriguez:

Wouldn't that be something?

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah.

Thomas Rodriguez:

We have a question that we like to ask all of our guests that come on here. We always call it the big question, because I think it's my favorite question to ask, because I think I've asked it the most, but I'll ask it to you: What does WT mean to you?

Coach Tom Brown:

What does WT mean to me? Right now, it means home. It means family. And we lost a big part of our family. Helen Piehl was a big part of our family and we lost her just recently. And it's tough, but the Schaeffers, the Bains. Even though we didn't always see eye to eye, Michael McBroom leaving, we lost a big piece as well. But you have that with the family, and it happens, but it's such a special place here. It's home for me. Whether I leave this year, or next year, or in 10 years, or in 20 years, WT will always be home. I say that about Winona, Minnesota as well. Winona, Minnesota will always be home. Woodbury, Minnesota will always be home. Those are the only three for me right now, and I don't like to jump around, but WT is home.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Yeah, WT is community and all that. It really is one of the best communities I've ever seen. I think that WT here is amazing, and has one of the best communities and the best experiences you can get out of any college ever. I haven't been to other colleges, so I can't say for certain, but I have seen from friends that I have who are from my high school who are going to different colleges, and it's not the same. They don't get the same community experience, they don't get the same kind of family that you get at WT.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yeah, there's no question about it. I mean, just even our administration across campus, people are willing to work with each other to make it a great experience. And when you're not willing to work with one another, then it's tough. And when you're not willing to support each other, that's tough. And that's one thing that I know we've got it in our athletic department. Everybody supports one another, and across campus, it seems like everybody supports one another. So it's a special place, and right now, it's home for me. That's what WT means.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Everyone has their own unique answers to the question, and I think yours kind of captures what they're all kind of feeling in that kind of like one word kind of answer.

Coach Tom Brown:

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Bring it all together, bring it home.

Thomas Rodriguez:

You got it, A+ 3.6 GPA and everything.

Coach Tom Brown:

Well, that would be an A/B there. I didn't get the A+, but... 3.67.

Thomas Rodriguez:

Close enough.

Coach Tom Brown:

We're going to take 3.67 all day.

Thomas Rodriguez:

I'll take As over Bs, that's all I'm saying.

Coach Tom Brown:

Yes.

Thomas Rodriguez:

All right. Well, thank you, Coach Brown, for joining me on the I Am WT Podcast. You've been a fantastic guest for me today. If you want to listen to any of our other episodes, you can find them at [wtamu.edu/podcasts](http://wtamu.edu/podcasts). Thank you all for listening to the IMWT podcast, and we'll catch you all next time.

Coach Tom Brown:

Thanks, Thomas. Appreciate you.