

Reflections from WT Buffalo Stadium Grand Opening with Special Guests WT Football Player Gerred Johnson, Cheerleader Kailey Whittington, and Band Member Kylee Gillenwaters

- Randy Ray: Welcome to Episode Number 12 of Reflections from WT, the Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. This episode is a special episode. This episode, in the entire time we're going to be celebrating our brand new stadium, and I'm really excited about it, and I know this guy sitting beside me is also excited about it. He's the President of West Texas A&M University, Dr. Walter Wendler.
- Dr. Wendler: I am excited, Randy. I'm really looking forward to this. It's going to change the nature of West Texas A&M University. Our campus is going to be different.
- Randy Ray: I agree. Before we talk to our guests, Dr. Wendler, I wanted to ask you, your training, your background is in architecture. As an architect, not as a university president, but as an architect, what do you think of our new stadium?
- Dr. Wendler: Well, and of course people are going to say, "Well, of course he's going to say that," I love it. It's a jewel. I played a little hockey in college juco. I was never a very good player, but I played, and one of the things about being on ice is that people are very close to you, and this reminds me of a hockey arena. People are close, both on the second deck and on the ground level that's bermed into the ground. It's going to be a great stadium, and I think the players are going to love it because there's going to be a lot of crowd engagement, and it's small, but it's a jewel.
- Dr. Wendler: I think it's going to be a really nice place to play football, plus it's going to be a focal point for the campus right there on Russell Long Boulevard. A lot of people haven't been out there lately, I'm sure, but if you look and you see that pedestrian walkway that goes the whole length of Russell Long, it's getting finished up and it's going to be amazing. My expectation is we're going to see families out there with kids, old guys like me walking to get some exercise on that walkway. I don't know what we're going to call it, maybe Buffalo Way, we'll figure that out, but it's going to be a very, very active place, I think, and we're looking forward to it.
- Randy Ray: Yeah. Don't you think that our stadium is going to be really high tech too?
- Dr. Wendler: Very high tech.
- Randy Ray: Yeah.
- Dr. Wendler: It's got ribbon boards all around it. It has the hottest Wi-Fi location in the whole Texas Panhandle. There's no hotter Wi-Fi location than what we're going to have. It's going to be NFL standards. Students, when they come to the game, they can do their homework while they're watching football. I'm only kidding. But it's going to be high tech, and we're getting ready to fire up the scoreboards and all that, and everything's going to be ready. Everything's on schedule, and

we're really excited about it. But it's going to be a very different kind of experience, even than big time DI football. It's going to be closer, more intimate. One of the beauties of WT and Division II Athletics is we know the student athletes and the student athletes are known by other students. They know students, they know their faculty, and that sort of intimacy is going to come alive in that stadium supported by high technology.

Randy Ray: Yeah. One of the things that I am excited about our new stadium is that you and the designers all thought about students when you started working on the design. Not only the players but also for example the high tech, the scoreboard, WT broadcasting students are going to be running that. It was designed for the band. It was designed for the cheerleaders and we're going to be talking to some of those other students in just a second.

Randy Ray: Dr Wendler, one of the things I wanted to ask you before we start talking to them is let's talk about the White Buffalo. The White Buffalo is something that has been around since the early '60s I believe. He's going to be at the new stadium.

Dr. Wendler: He is. The pedestal is all set. It's blocked up. It's poured. Pretty soon, I'm not sure when, but I mean like tomorrow, that beast is going to be on top of that pedestal and it's going to be right there kind of at the entry to the stadium. I think it's going to be amazing. It was beautiful when it was up on the hill at Kimbrough, but you couldn't get near it. It was hard to get close to it. Now you're going to be able to go and get photographed in front of it, so I think it's going to be a really... I think it's going to be a nice addition and it means a lot to a lot of people.

Randy Ray: It does.

Dr. Wendler: There have been some generous donors that have helped fund that area right in front. It's going to be nicely landscaped and it's going to be special.

Randy Ray: I think it's a good tie to Kimbrough, don't you think?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. Oh, oh yeah.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Kimbrough is always going to be special in everybody's hearts, and even the next generation of students will hear about Kimbrough. It's part of the culture and the tradition of WT. I have a picture in my office of a couple of board members and President Cornette standing out in front looking over the area before there was a stadium there, and it was a piece of prairie with a little bit of a gully in it. They turned it into a football stadium, and it was cool. At the time it was really cool, but yeah, it's going to be a remembrance of that.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: It's all good, all good.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Well, let me introduce our special guests today. Normally we have one guest. Today we have three, and we've invited three students to join us today to help us celebrate our new stadium. Joining us today is Kailey Whittington, a psychology major from Canyon, Texas, football player Gerred Johnson, senior broadcasting major from Mansfield, Texas, and Kylee Gillenwaters. She is from Bushland and she is the drum major and she also plays clarinet. So welcome to you three.

Gerred Johnson: Thank you. Thank you.

Randy Ray: Gerred, I'm going to ask you first, and because I know you best, you were in one of my classes-

Gerred Johnson: Yeah.

Randy Ray: ... if not several, right? I'm just going to ask you, before we get started talking about the stadium, Gerred, don't you think that student athletes sometimes get the bum rap when it comes to their academic work, and I ask you that because you did a great job in my classes. One of the things that I noticed about student athletes is they're disciplined, and I think that discipline a lot of times goes over to their academics as well. Would you agree with that?

Gerred Johnson: Oh, most definitely. A lot of people kind of like, they see us more focused on the field just because that's what we do pretty much 24/7, but our main primary focus is classwork. It's student first, athlete second.

Randy Ray: Tell me how you're feeling about the new stadium.

Gerred Johnson: Oh man, I'm excited. There's not a time we're on the field working out we're not looking over at the stadium. We're just excited.

Randy Ray: Yeah. What do you think your favorite thing about playing in the new stadium is going to be?

Gerred Johnson: Walking down that tunnel the first game.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Gerred Johnson: Seeing everybody in the stands.

Randy Ray: I'm going to switch gears and I'm going to talk to Kylee. Kylee, the band is as big a part of game day as the football players are really. What are you looking forward to in the new stadium?

Kylee Gillenwaters: Yes, in the new stadium we are really looking forward to getting to support the football team and getting to march on that new field, the new turf out there. We're really looking forward to what it's going to be like, what the atmosphere will look like, what it will feel like, and how it will be to support everybody.

Randy Ray: Kailey, you are a psychology major and you are from Canyon. As a WT cheerleader, what does the new stadium mean to you?

Kailey Whittington: The new stadium to me is a sign of a new beginning. I mean, it's a new start to a new season. It's the beginning of an era, I mean, we're starting here. We left Kimbrough behind and it gives us a chance to start a new legacy.

Randy Ray: Okay, we're going to take a break and when we come back, we're going to talk a little bit more about our brand new stadium that opens in just a few days. We're really excited about it. We'll be back in just a minute.

Speaker 6: 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.

Speaker 6: It's our alumni and donors that make the big difference and set us apart from other universities. With your support, WT will continue to award scholarships to deserving students and strengthen our programs, which means a better campus, more in-depth education, and a lasting cultural and economic impact on our region. Now is the time to strengthen connections, support students, and open doors for tomorrow's leaders. Share your experience, share your heritage, share your pride.

Randy Ray: Welcome back to Episode Number 12 of Reflections from WT, the Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. Today we are celebrating the brand spanning new campus stadium, and I'm excited about it. It is a fantastic day to be a Buffalo fan, and I'm not only excited about the game. I think the game is going to be great when we open up on the very first day, September 7th, when we play Azusa Pacific at 6:00 PM, but I'm also excited about the entire day, the entire game day.

Randy Ray: Kylee, Kailey, Gerred, let's talk about game day. One of the things that I love about football is tailgating. What do you think the tailgating is going to be like once the new stadium opens?

Gerred Johnson: I guess I'll take it first. I'm excited for it because the vision Coach has for us when we actually get to be a part of tailgating this year like it's never been done before at Kimbrough. We just show up while everybody else is tailgating, and this year we get to actually-

Randy Ray: Be a part of it.

Gerred Johnson: ... be a part of it.

Randy Ray: Yeah. That's cool.

Gerred Johnson: Yeah, interact with the people before we get to the stadium and get ready for the game.

Randy Ray: I will tell you guys, and I haven't talked a whole lot about it, but one of the things that we are launching over here with KWTS is on every game day, it's going to be called Tailgate Radio, and we're going to be playing music that everyone likes, and we're going to be not only playing music that people can tailgate to, but we're also going to be talking to people like you, Gerred, and like you, Kailey and Kylee, where you would come in and we just talk about what you're going to be doing later on during that day. My dream is that when people are out tailgating, everyone is tuned in to 91.1 and everyone's listening together. We're listening to players, we're listening to coaches, we're listening to cheerleaders, we're listening to band people, and just getting excited for the game, so that's one of the things I'm excited about. I think it's going to really add to the game. Now Kylee, what about you? What does tailgating mean to you?

Kylee Gillenwaters: So for the band, whenever we do tailgating, we go and we play for the alumni, and so we're really looking forward to playing for the alumni, watching their reactions and getting to witness them make history and witness us make history.

Randy Ray: Kailey, what plans do the cheerleaders have for the tailgating?

Kailey Whittington: The tailgating is really big for us because it gives us one, an opportunity to get something to eat before the game. We're in between volleyball and football, and half the time we're too busy to eat, so it gives us a chance to grab a bite to eat and mingle with the alumni of WT, and so that's really cool and we get to perform for the alumni as well, and that's a pretty cool opportunity. With the new facility, we're going to be able to be more involved because we're just going to be more close-knit.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, I'm going to ask you, people have asked me, what about parking? Parking's always an issue on campus. How are we going to deal with that?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I'll tell you this, Randy. We have more parking spaces available on campus than we had at Kimbrough, so that's fact number one. There'll be more places to park. Fact number two is the big parking lot at Kimbrough, it was rough. I mean, even if it was a brand new concrete parking lot, it's a long walk. You're walking through a sea of cars. It's not a pleasant walk directly, but on campus, there'll be lots all over the campus that are going to be open and there's different priority on the lots and so on, but the fact of the matter is there'll be plenty of places for people to park.

Dr. Wendler: Here's what for me as an architect, after they park the car, when they walk into the stadium, they're going to have a nice walk. Our campus is beautiful. It's nicely landscaped. It's well lit at night. The parking lots are smaller. You'll be able to identify your car easily in the parking lot. It's not like, "What row did I park in?" You'll remember, and I think the parking is going to be fine.

Dr. Wendler: Now, there'll be some hiccups, there's always some hiccups, but I think after two or three games, we'll have it down. It'll be silky smooth. Everybody will know what to do, how to get to their spaces, what the best lots are for them. A lot of them will be open lots, but early on we'll have plenty of workers out and around to tell people which lots are still available and give some guidance and so on and so forth, so we're treating it seriously.

Randy Ray: I would encourage people that have any concern whatsoever or just questions about game day to go to [www.map.wtamu.edu](http://www.map.wtamu.edu), and there's all the information about how to park, what to do on game day, tailgating. All the information's going to be on there.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, and I would point out some of the tailgating is going to be family-friendly. There will be little quieter places for kids and so on and so forth, and that'll all be available, plus Ann Underwood and the people that work in communications, they'll be constantly updating that website. I mean, here we are, it's the beginning of August. For this whole month, there'll be updates all the time. There'll be photographs. There'll be things that will help people queue up the experience and make it as smooth as they can, but I will promise you, it's going to be... The construction is nearing completion, the roads, the sidewalks. Everything's going to be clean and bright, and it's going to be a great experience transitioning from the campus into the stadium. It's something we haven't done in 60 years, 60 years.

Randy Ray: Yeah, that's a long time, and I think in those 60 years, people would come to a WT game and never set foot on campus. They didn't even know what our campus looks like, and I'm excited about people getting to come to our home. We have a beautiful campus, and I've said this before, a lot of times students don't realize what WT is like until they come here, so I am not going to be surprised if we see our enrollment jump after people start walking on campus. It's just the atmosphere we have here.

Dr. Wendler: Randy, I don't want to overstate the case, and you may have heard this story. The first year I was here, I bumped into a family, a mom and dad and their son. They were from Tampa Bay, Florida and they had a plan. They were going to fly up to Amarillo, rent a car, and drive back to Tampa Bay and visit seven campuses. The first one on the list was WT. Texas Tech was on the list. After that, I forget, but we were the first two that they were going to visit. The dad told me the son was on campus for 20 minutes. He said, "Dad, we need to change our reservations. We can fly back to Tampa Bay. This is where I'm going to go to school." That's what the son told the father and the father told me, and

that is West Texas. That is WT. That is the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Hospitality.

Randy Ray: Kailey, Kylie, Gerred, let's talk about that. What sold you on WT? What was the first thing that you said, "Yeah, I think I want to go school here."

Kylee Gillenwaters: So WT, there's just something about it that is so homey. Ever since I was in middle school, I would come here for band camp, middle school and high school, and it never really was a question for me if I was going to come to school here. I never applied anywhere else. WT was the place I applied for, and even just coming here, driving from Amarillo to Canyon and looking over that hill and just getting to see like, "This is Canyon. This is home," and something about WT and the people there, from the residence halls to the JBK, everything about it is just home.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Kailey, you grew up in Canyon. Why did you stick around and go to WT?

Kailey Whittington: WT, the reason I stayed, I have a really big family. I'm the youngest of four and I have six nieces and nephews, and I can't imagine being away from school and being away from my babies all the time, and family is really big to me. It's really huge, and WT provided an opportunity to be close to my family as well as get an incredible education.

Randy Ray: Gerred, let me ask you, you're from Mansfield, Texas near the Metroplex area.

Gerred Johnson: Yeah.

Randy Ray: It was a big change coming to the panhandle.

Gerred Johnson: It was a major culture shock. When I came in, it was a completely different coaching staff, but the basics of everything, the whole university together, it's always been family-oriented and I'm a very family-oriented person, so when I got here, it was just like, "There's nothing around here," but I've met so many people and they're just so nice. I was like, "Okay, this might be the place."

Randy Ray: All right. Well, we are about out of time. I wanted to ask one more question, and we always end with a curve ball I always like throwing out, and this one's not that hard. I would just like everyone to say to our listeners what you want them to pay attention to on game day. Is that tough? What are you most excited about? What do you want our visitors to see more than anything else? Gerred, you're first.

Gerred Johnson: All right, all right. Well, I'm going to send a big shout out to the Maroon Platoon. They're going to tear up our opponents behind their seats.

Randy Ray: Kylee?

Kylee Gillenwaters: So on game day, I really want everybody to watch out for how WT comes together as a family. This is the football team, the cheerleaders, the band, but also the fans that come and support the students, everyone who's working the technical side of things, filming, just all around, really watch for how we come together as a family. That's what I'm looking forward to seeing.

Randy Ray: Kailey?

Kailey Whittington: The thing I want visitors to see is our campus as a whole. Going to Kimbrough before this new stadium, they never saw, they never stepped foot on campus, and we have one of the most beautiful campuses. It's so green and it's so well taken care of, and I want to show that off, and I'm really excited for that.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr Wendler, what is the one thing you want people to notice more than anything else?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I want them to see the life that has just so recently been energized out there on Russell Long Boulevard, brand new ag facilities that were in many ways made possible by President Long when he was here because he started the Ag PhD program. Without the AG PhD program, we don't get a new ag facility. Without the new ag facility, that corner is vacant, and the football stadium and the Bureau and TVMDL, they're not all modded together. This thing is woven together out there.

Dr. Wendler: Then another thing that I would like people to see is that WT, like any good organization, runs on vision, and it's not mine alone. There are a lot of people involved. Russell Long, President O'Brien had the vision to talk to the students about increasing a fee upon themselves that they would never benefit from directly, although they do, but it's a long-term benefit, but the vision of these three presidents and some before them, it's interesting to watch it all unfold. But vision, you can see a long way up here in the Texas Panhandle, as everybody knows. It's flat out there. It's so flat, you can watch your dog run away for three days from your back porch. I mean, it is flat, but it inspires vision, and that's what I like about West Texas A&M University, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle.

Randy Ray: That's right, and I'm excited about the vision of our new stadium. The Buffalo Stadium ribbon-cutting is going to take place on September the 6th at 11 o'clock in the morning, followed by a stadium open house where people can come and they can see our new house. I'm also excited about the White Buffalo is going to be unveiled and dedicated the morning of September 6th, and then game day happens on September 7th when the Fighting Buffaloes take on Azusa Pacific at



6:00 PM. It's going to be an incredible day and we want as many people here as possible. It's fantastic. I cannot wait. Thank you all for joining me today. These are exciting times at West Texas A&M University. Thank you for joining us for Reflections from WT, the Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. Please join us again next time. We'll see you then.