

Marc Murphy: I'm Marc Murphy. I'm a chef, restaurateur, and a host of the new podcast from iHeartRadio called Food 360. Join me as we take a 360-degree look at history, science, culture, and more all through the lens of food.

Female Speaker: The most important thing for me is not my writing ego. It's getting people to cook delicious food.

Marc Murphy: Be sure to subscribe to Food 360 on the iHeartRadio app, Apple Podcast, or wherever you listen to your favorite shows.

Male Speaker: This is Wins & Losses with Clay Travis. Plain talks with the most entertaining people in sports, entertainment, and business. Now, here's Clay Travis.

Clay Travis: Welcome in the Wins & Losses podcast. So this is Episode 3. If you haven't listened to the first two, I think you guys will really enjoy it. We had Jason Whitlock on Episode 1 from FS1's Speak For Yourself, Episode 2, the founder of Rivals and 24/7, Shannon Terry, incredible entrepreneur who sold both of those for over \$100 million to Yahoo and CBS respectively.

Goal of the Wins & Losses podcast is to try and figure out how you ended up where you did and also focus just as much on some of the losses you had along the way as the wins. It's easy to focus on success. But I think that often times, we learn much more from the losses along the way.

We are joined today for our third episode by SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey. You can find him on Twitter at @GregSankey and tell him what a fabulous job you think he has done as the SEC Commissioner because he gets a lot of hate on there and I want you guys to flood him with love.

Greg Sankey, are you excited to be the third guest on the Wins & Losses podcast?

Greg Sankey: I was on the first day of your radio broadcast, so I have slipped two notches.

That's right. You did come on the first time we did that, I think the coverage. I remember that. That was outstanding.

Well, I don't know where our relationship has gone awry, but it's worth noting.

So I have to make a point there. I can also have multiple guests on the radio show, so you weren't the only guest on the radio show that did.

Okay, okay.

But you did make the top three which would get you a bronze medal as an important part of this program. So for people who don't know you, you can find him on Twitter and again, I'd encourage you to follow him on Twitter @GregSankey. I always encourage people to let us know also what you think of these interviews.

The feedback has been phenomenal so far and I think both Shannon Terry and Jason Whitlock have appreciated you guys reaching out and saying you've been listening.

But, Greg Sankey, you are the SEC Commissioner taking over for Mike Slive. And for a lot of people, that's where they started to pay attention to your career, right? That's where they suddenly became aware that you were at the SEC office. The step up from number two to number one can be massive and we'll get to that for a minute.

But before that, you grew up where? What was your life like when you were a young guy?

Yeah, I grew up ... I was born in a place called Auburn, New York which is ironic given that the city where I was born bears the name of one of the universities in the Southeastern Conference. It's about 30 miles west of Syracuse in the Finger Lakes region as it's known which is pleasant in the summer time and not so nice in January and February.

Do you remember ... You grew up there. So you ... And did you remember watching any SEC sporting events when you were growing up in that region?

Yeah, probably the first time would have been an NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament games and then, you know, football games through the old NCAA package. People forget and, you know, if any people are probably listening to the podcast don't realize that back in the '70s and early '80s, the NCAA controlled all of college football TV, so there was a scarcity of games on television. So I would have watched. And when I started to have memories, probably late teen years specifically of football games, you know, Alabama-Penn State National Championship Game at Georgia when they won with Herschel Walker in '80. Those would probably be more resonant for me as it relates to the Southeastern Conference, Syracuse University, being 30 miles away, captured more of the attention at that time in my life.

So what sports did you play growing up?

I played, you know, whatever I could. So as a young kid, I played baseball, basketball, and ice hockey. The ice hockey career ended in junior high as I grew to be over 6-feet tall, so basketball took over. So baseball and basketball were focus sports for me.

And what were you best at?

Oh, you know, it depends on what level. There was probably a time, you know, in high school, basketball was pretty good. I played junior college basketball. I played baseball in college as well. I loved the game of baseball, but that doesn't relate to proficiency necessarily.

What position did you play in baseball?

Catcher. Yeah.

What was your strength? Yeah. What was your strength as catcher?

Warming up pitchers in the bullpen.

So you were not on the field that much?

In college, I was the backup catcher in my freshman year. And so, I had caught a knuckleballer with regularity which is interesting. If you never had that experience, you learn how to pay attention all the way through the pitch motion until it lands in your glove literally. I was okay defensively, but I was a backup catcher. I probably learned a few leadership lessons through that, and I could bring some energy and enthusiasm to a team.

Where did you go to school? So you go to college where? Also in New York?

Yeah ... No, all over, actually. So all this discussion about transfers is relevant in my life. I started out at a small college. I was studying electrical engineering in Texas called LeTourneau College.

How in the world do you end up there? I had no idea.

Yeah. Well, my dad is a welder. He's a union pipefitter. He works on a construction job for 50-plus years and worked throughout engineers and he wanted to have a son who is an engineer. I was the firstborn, so I was the first to have the chance to take a run at that experience.

And so I studied that for a couple of years, I wanted to go to Texas. You know, it was time to live in adventure growing up in Upstate New York, so pretty good engineering schools, small private college, and that's what put me there. And then after a year-and-a-half, I'm like, "Do I really want to be an engineer?" I had an engineering lab, electrical engineering lab every Friday afternoon at like 4 o'clock. And from your college days, I assume you can understand that going to an engineering lab and studying circuitry at 4 PM on Fridays did not exactly make my heart beat faster. And it just ... Really more than that, I just started raising questions in my mind about what is it that I want to do and why.

And so, I ended up back in New York at a community college, junior college, kind of recalibrating, stayed in engineering, and then I said, "You know what? I'm going to be a teacher and coach." I went into education and I was graduating from Cortland State University of New York System, College of Cortland. I call it Cortland State. And that was about an hour before I grew up and was pretty much a utilitarian experience for me. I could do that, and I wanted to get into coaching at that point. So I coached some baseball in junior high and high school basketball and ran a recreation program, just trying to build a resume really early on. So this is like '85, '86, '87.

So when you went to Texas from Upstate New York, first of all, the weather probably had to blow your mind how hot it was. But was that an unbelievable culture shock for you at that time? Because I ... For people out there listening right now, when I went away from Nashville to Washington DC to go to college, it was a big culture shock for me. And I feel like kids are more as, you know, the ages have grown, they're more technologically astute, they're more aware of maybe what different parts of the country are like but that had to be wild for you to go from Upstate New York to Texas, right?

Well, first of all, I remember I was catching in baseball and it's like 102 degrees, we were putting on, you know, chest protector, shin guard, masks to sweat in and like ... So that was a shock. I can vividly remember the first time I played in the fall, baseball game, because I was used to play in fall games. And just like we're playing in a 102-degree heat and you have on the tools of ignorance as they're known and just sweating profusely.

And yeah, you know, culture shock, I was trying to figure out, you know, how to survive in college, in trigonometry and algebra then calculus, so that was really my focus. But I vividly remember kind of being wide-eyed that I was in Texas but also, you know, there are a lot of Baptist churches around and not as many Catholic churches and in New York, there are a lot of Catholic churches and not as many Baptist churches. So those are like the quick impressions.

You said your dad was a welder. Did you guys travel very much when you were growing up?

Yeah, that's a really insightful question, given that work. No, we were really fortunate. So my dad's dad did, you know, travel around from job to job across the country and he didn't settle down until he was in high school, my dad, in the mid-50s and then late '50s actually.

And then most of his life was in that central New York area. There was enough work with power plants, some nuclear power plants, gas-fired, coal-fired power plants, along with gas lines and building that we didn't have kind of the camper life that some others did. In fact, he spent six months in the late '60s working in Korea on pipelines.

Wow.

And we have a family film of, you know, like literally put steel pipe, you know, 24-inch steel pipe and put it on at the backs of workers. The Korean people who would carry it and put it in the desk, where we had side booms and bulldozers and backhoes to do that work. And they are like livestock moving pipe and equipment in those films in the late '60s.

So that was really the only time that he spent time away. It was a good thing for us that in a way I had a stable life and they still live in Upstate New York and has worked in the same United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union for, you know, 50-plus years.

You didn't know it then but do you think having a blue-collar background in terms of what your dad did has helped you to connect a little bit better with a lot of athletes who certainly are coming into the Southeastern Conference now who aren't all coming from, you know, white-collar backgrounds, right?

Yeah.

I mean a lot of people are coming in.

Well, I think there's a couple of things as far as and it particularly relates to the theme of the podcast, you know, kind of what got you here.

So two summers when I was in college, I actually worked on a construction projects at nuclear plants which sounds kind of like Homer Simpson and Mr. Burns, right?

Yeah, right.

But literally spent those summers, I made great money, it was a lug and tug crew, you're picking things up and getting it ready to prepare you. Obviously, we weren't doing anything that's had a long-term functional or safety issue involved. But, you know, it was a 10-hour a day, so I had to drive an hour to work in place called Oswego, New York. And it was an hour up, you had to be in place at 7 am and you work until 5:30 and you're working 6 days a week. And, you know, you had time and a half and double time over like 50 hours, so when you're 19, 20 years old, that's great. But I saw that life you asked me about where people kind of boomers, boom from job to job and they had a travel trailer and they might have a family.

And one of the great lines that was shared to me by one of my co-workers is you don't know what pressure is like until you've got your wife and your kids in the car and you have to pass a welding test in order to get a paycheck the next week.

And people ask me about pressure and there's pressure in this job. There's visibility that's not present for a welder.

I also learned a really important lesson like the first year, I've been up there two months I woke up, I was sick in one of those summer colds and sore throat. I said, "I'm not going to be able to go in today." My dad was working in a different job, he was up early, he looked at me and said, "That's okay, just call him, tell him you won't be in today or the rest of the summer, that you can't make it today then you're done." I went back and put on my work clothes, bought a box of tissues and a gallon of orange juice and I made it through the day. And you learn a little bit about work ethics in those circumstances.

So you said that you came out thinking you were going to coach. We're talking to SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey here on the Wins & Losses podcast. You said you came out thinking you were going to coach basketball, baseball, whatever it was. Did you have a target of what you thought you were going to do?

Yeah, I thought I'd end up coaching. Basketball is my focus at the high school level first. My field of vision for that point in my life was to do a three-hour circle around Syracuse, New York, probably not much more North but over to Albany, Buffalo, down towards Binghamton, and the Pennsylvania border. I figured I'd teach in some school there initially. And then I'll coach and then my dreams ... My dreams, I used to think about ... In fact my senior year in college, I was an assistant varsity coach for a large school in boys' basketball and they talked about going to the final four and, you know, sleeping six to a rooms so like, I was like, "Man, someday, I could get to go to the final four and maybe I could be like a Division III coach."

In fact, John Beilein, who just took the Cleveland Cavaliers' job was coaching at the Division II college in Syracuse, so I'd go watch his games back in the mid-80s. I had a friend who was an assistant coach on his staff. And his career was probably one that would've been the template for me, because he went high school to junior college, a smaller college and then up the chain of Division I. But I could see my initial job which never materialized by the way and I ended up

right out of college going to work at a college setting, which recast the direction of my career and literally my life.

So what happens then? You graduate, you're thinking you might try and be a high school basketball coach that's an ambition in your life and instead, like a lot of people out there, you graduate from college and maybe you find a job doing something different than you had anticipated, what was that job?

Yeah, I became the director of intramural sports at Utica College in Utica, New York. And if you're old enough to remember the Lite Beer commercials, Ken Brett, one time was in the last feeling taste great commercial and ends with Utica, Utica towards his brothers. So there's a minor league team, and it had been traded off, but literally, I applied through a newspaper classified ad. That was my source. It wasn't like ... I didn't know anybody, I just send a letter and a résumé in to a classified ad right out of college, and I was sending as you can imagine résumés all over, to grab a job.

And I was invited to interview, and I had actually two job offers, one was coaching women's basketball at a junior college and teaching, and then this intramural job. And I took the intramural job because I was able to attend Syracuse University on remitted tuitions where I work full time. And then every Wednesday, I drive a little over an hour to Syracuse, go to two classes, you know, two like, three-hour classes in one day. And it took two years and did the bulk of my masters work that way.

One of the really key decisions that I took the job and I was going to wait a year to start my graduate program, I've been in college. I've taken five years to finish four-year program because of my transfers and trying to figure it out. And I said to my boss, he said one day, "When are you going to start your graduate program?" I said, "I'm going to wait a year." And he gave me the best advice of my career which was ... he said, "If you don't start now, you never will." So I went ahead and enrolled and started. And that just started a sequence of events from a timing standpoint that were critically important to the opportunities that have unfolded for me.

How much did you get paid, do you remember at that first job as the intramural supervisor?

15 grand a year before taxes. And that was a time period where remitted tuition had generally not been taxed, but I was fortunate for my two years of remitted tuition at a private university for a master's degree to also be taxed on that tuition benefits. So I would work weekends on the facility to supervise because I pay a little bit extra, like, an hourly wage, whatever it was, 5 bucks an hour just trying to make it work.

So what did you do as intramural supervisor? Did you actually ref games? Did you put together, like, the sports, I mean, what exactly was your day-to-day when you were doing that job?

Yeah, I showed up at like 10 in the morning, and I had to teach some classes, but I'd be there until 10 or 11 at night, every day of the week, and then depending on the sports season, maybe until midnight. I put together the whole program, so you play flag football, and volleyball, and I just ... It was a creative opportunity.

They'd had someone but they basically said, "Okay, here it is." And I have never planned on doing this work, but had played intramurals in college and whether I was playing intramurals or running this program, I learned a key lesson which helps me today, which is, when you're like 19 and 20 years old, you'll tear your friend's arms off to win an intramural championship t-shirt which is right.

So true.

If you talk to college students, it is a universal truth.

Yes.

Which we face ethical challenges in the way 50 and 60-year-old coaches conduct themselves. And it shouldn't surprise us if that's the case if when they're 19 and 20, they're going to do whatever. So, you know, that was the officiating. I learned a lot. I had the schedules board and schedule the gym. I oversaw a facility with a pool, and racquetball courts, and weight rooms, and just kind of made it all work. I was the very low person on the totem pole who's like, "Okay, you run the facility. You make sure it's open on weekends, that we've got lifeguards, and things are set up for games."

And I was a PA announcer for Division III basketball for a couple years as well. Just kind of, whatever opportunity was there, I took the mindset that I'd say yes because that would provide a learning opportunity.

So were you a single guy at this point, running as a director of intramurals?

Yeah.

So how long did you keep that job?

Two years in fact, so this was ... I graduated from college in '87 and graduated in May and started that job August 1st. I was a lifeguard at a sailing club at the lake which sounds more prestigious than it was. But I had enough money to put gas in the tank and put a deposit down on an apartment, started in August. And then, my wife now, then, we're dating. And November of '88 which clearly shows I didn't have a vision for being the commissioner of the Southeastern Conference because our wedding anniversary falls on the Alabama-LSU weekend every year.

So if I were going back to then, like, if we can go back in time to SUNY Oswego, I think, right, is the school ...

No, Cortland, Cortland.

Cortland. Cortland.

Cortland Oswego.

Yeah, working at Oswego, though, I show up in the intramurals, and I walk in to your office in intramurals one morning and I said, "Hey, I think you got a shot to one day be the commissioner of a conference." Your response would have been what?

Seriously? Because that was not even on the radar screen. I will say a couple things that I did then that were really ... There were some foresight there by happenstance. One is, I bought an NCAA rule manual, because I was in grad school, I was in, like, it was really a higher education master's degree, but they called it Athletic Administration or something like that. And so I started ... I read, like, from cover to cover of the NCAA rule book. So I became familiar with that regulatory structure.

I also worked at a place; it was moving from Division I back to Division III. So a guy named Larry Costello, I came to know, Larry had played in the NBA, coached the Milwaukee Bucks when Kareem played and they won an NBA Championship in the early '70s. I mean, this is ... He's a hall of famer, just a phenomenal person. And so I got to be around people who'd been in college sports or in professional sports at a higher level.

So I read this manual, I learned, and I got to be around some people that had some sophistication in sport. And then, I mean, the master's program, kind of, devouring every piece of information about intercollegiate athletics that I could. So there was this, kind of, a flicker of a flame where I wouldn't have said, "You're crazy," I would have said, "Seriously?" if you would come in and made that type of prediction that ...

How many people do you think, at that time, had even read the NCAA manual?

Not many because it was really awkwardly written at the time, I'm going to say.

Yeah, right.

So this was right around SMU death penalty time, lend by us, Maryland that passed away which resulted in a thorough review of circumstances there. You can go back and find this whole pay for play debate, and some of my master's observations, master's documents, papers, whatever you may call them just a comparison. I was, kind of, a ravenous consumer of information at that time and the printed materials, Sports Illustrated, Sporting News, sport magazine had a lot of long form in-depth reporting which, again, as an illustration of 30 years

later, that's really ... Those publications either don't exist or certainly changed, but I took all that in as part of the educational process.

Now, were you a good student when you were in high school and you were in college, or was it that you found this particular area of interest and it just captivated you in some way? I mean, how would you assess your academic background?

Yeah, when I walked into college, I don't ... I was a good student, not grade. I wasn't in a like a great high school situation to prepare me. So I walked in engineering school. I looked back and I was no more prepared to start studying engineering successfully as an 18-year-old than I would have been to fly an airplane at that point. So I had to learn how to learn.

One of the best things that happened to me is I ended up in a 5-credit hour Calculus 1 class by sophomore year and ... I mean, every day, you had an hour-long class in calculus with homework. And if you ever got behind, you were done. And that's why it taught me to learn how to learn. So of anything that happened in my first couple years of college, the process of learning to learn was critically important.

And then, I decided, "Hey, I want to pursue something that I'm passionate about, the sports area." But working with people and teaching kind of ... It resonated. And so, I became really successful from an academic standpoint. I challenged myself a little bit more with different classes from an elective standpoint.

Then when I started my master's program, I remember vividly in my first class, there were about a dozen people and we're studying the foundations of American higher education which I knew nothing about. Ironically, I work in American higher education, so it was a long-term beneficial experience.

But we had like an hour discussion, lecture and then we break into small groups. And the first time I'm there, I realized that everybody is in their doctoral program in this group and I'm just starting a master's. So they've got some problem that I don't recall, and they go around the table, and there's like six of us in this group. And they get to me and say, "Well, what do you think?" and I was very honest. I said, "Look, I'm just starting my master's. I can't contribute anything to this discussion right now. But I promise you, as we move towards the end of the semester, I will figure this out and be fully engaged." And I offer that story just as a representation of the growth that happened from an educational academic standpoint along my journey.

So by the end of the class, I was doing just that. And one of the people who sat at that table had said, "That's one of the most remarkable things that I ... That she had seen." She was finishing her doctoral program that you would have the confidence and I'm like I wasn't confident, I was scared to death to just admit what you didn't know but promise that you'd catch up and you did what you said.

So you get your master's at Syracuse and what happens next?

Yeah. So I finished that program. My wife and I were married in November of '87. Fast forward to spring of '88, we had a conversation about what's next in our life. She was a registered nurse and it was the early married life wherein you don't know really much about anything, I guess.

And looking back and ... This conversation resulted in my observation that I always wondered if I could work in Division I college sports. And so, I just started sending resumes out and I ended up with a response from a place called Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana. I've written to ... I remember Michigan, Arizona State, Syracuse. I talked to Syracuse for a brief period of time. But I ended up buying my own plane ticket to Shreveport and they picked me up, drove me an hour south to Natchitoches and it was at a time when you could find a little bit about Northwestern State. They're 1-AA in football. Gary Reasons who played for New York Giants had attended there and Mark Duper, the receiver for the Miami Dolphins, John Stevens was Rookie of the Year, and they had Steve running back for the Patriots. So Bobby Hebert played there.

So there was enough substance that you're like, "Okay." You go down there and met the AD and, just on ... It doesn't seem like it made a lot of sense now. But then, it's like, "Hey, here's our adventure." So we packed up everything in the summer of '89 and drove a budget-rented truck, pulling a 1987 Dodge Shadow on a two-wheel dolly from Utica, New York to Natchitoches, Louisiana and we didn't have air conditioning in our car. It was like hot and humid like I've never really experienced, even at Texas time and like over the ... The plan was I made \$500 a month in the internships. I'd gone from like \$18,000, so I'd been provided a raise down to 6.

I was married. I knew we had enough money to make it into December if Cathy, my wife, didn't get a job. She ended up pretty quickly becoming a nurse in the Natchitoches Parish Hospital. She worked third shifts. So like I'd go to work in the morning, I'd come home, we'd eat dinner together, and she'd go to work, she'd come home without breakfast, she'd tell me all the overnight hospital stories of which there were many adventures during that time.

And that was the kind of life. There was ... Which is she worked, I worked, and we didn't know a soul in Natchitoches, Louisiana, probably really good for our marriage because we had to get along, otherwise, it was going to go really bad. I did that for a year. I became the golf coach. They needed a golf coach. I'm like, "Okay, I'll coach the golf team. I want to ..."

Were you any good at golf?

No, I was average. I had a nice set of Ping Eye 2 clubs that were in vogue then, and that AD saw it, he fired the coach. I walked into his office and he said, "Yeah, I need a golf coach." Remember I said like the PA announcer, I'd never say, "No."

Yeah.

And so, I took over ...

So you just took over as a golf ... I didn't know this. You took over as a golf coach at South ...

Yeah.

Yeah.

Northwestern State. We didn't have a schedule, so I put together a schedule. We didn't have uniforms. I should, like, personally apologize to each of the players because they ordered gray sansabelt slacks for their golf uniforms that year. They were like college kids. It seemed so wrong at this point. A lot of polyester involved.

And then, that ...

Hold on, weren't some of the players probably better at golf than you?

Oh, by far, every one of them.

So how did you coach? How did you coach golf?

I made a lot of phone calls, and I stayed out of their way, I got into tee times on time, and I really started asking them questions. I made sure that they were in a little bit of decent shape. I figured that I couldn't help them on the course, but I could help them mentally in advance.

So you played a lot of 36, 18 rounds and I started having them to run the stadium ramps and they were like, "Why are we doing this?" And I said, "Because you need to be in a little bit of shape." And then, I remember vividly like after we've done this a few times and I think I'm crazy, we played one of these 36-hole days and they were like, "Oh, yeah." And these guys have finished last in the conference every year by the way. And we ... So we had this 36-hole day and when they finished, we're going out to dinner and I said, "I could tell I was a lot more prepared for this than the guys I was playing with." They were all dragging at the end and it was like a recognition of just the mental aspect.

And then I asked questions and they all ... We're going to have teachers and instructors anyway even 30 years ago. And the guy before me got in a couple of fights apparently on the court with colleagues, so the fact that I never got in a fight won me like a Coach of the Year Award.

So what was the raise to go from intern there to ... What were you getting paid as the golf coach?

Nothing. That was a big ... Yeah, I had a \$9,000 budget and I went out and raised like another 15 or 20 through a golf tournament. I wrote every PGA and LPGA professional asking them for stuff for silent auction on the golf tournament.

How many of them responded?

Oh, a lot of them, like one time that Peter Jacobsen in an airline, he said, "You don't know this, but you helped me like make my budget hell." Everyone was awesome, he had won the US Open and sent me autograph passes.

I actually had somebody bid for me. I have a Jack Nicklaus Sports Illustrated cover when he had won his last Masters, with the autograph. And so I didn't want people to think I was doing anything wrong, so I had somebody bid for me to bid it off. Just because that's ... We had \$9,000 was my budget and, you know, you had to play a certain number of days and I forget the numbers, but we could play like half of what we needed to do. We had an old Grey Ford man, where if you pulled the floor up, like the vinyl flooring, you'd see the road. It was an adventure.

And went out and recruited a little bit and so I added some players over a couple of years. I got paid nothing for that. You're asking about salaries, so, when I got ... I was hired as director of compliance that next summer full time because they went through a pretty significant infractions case with the NCAA. In fact that most allegations in a case I've ever seen. I've been on the Committee of Infractions for nine years.

What were they cheating, doing there?

Men's basketball. Yeah, so they had a coach that had been an assistant. Actually [inaudible 0:32:11] school, he came back to his alma mater. And there was like a \$10,000 check that was offered, and the defense was, it was kind of a joke. And it was two- or three-year investigation. So I'm there, I'm an intern, I decided that I was going to stay because I was learning a lot. I have always decided to kind of put money in the background as long as we could survive and kind of grow my career.

But I was there, and they said, "Hey, we got this position, would you be interested?" And I didn't know a lot about it but like read the NCAA manual as you recall, and I paid attention to the NCAA newspaper that came out every week. So I knew what was going on.

I got hired on like a Friday and on Wednesday, I'm on an airplane do a Committee on Infractions hearing at Colorado Springs over at dinner. And the vice president of the university, we're just talking and it's like I didn't need any job description, because that night he looks at me and says, "Well, we know if we're ever here again as a university, Sankey won't be with us." So that was one of those motivational talks.

So I want to ask this too, where did you meet your wife? Because you bring her immediately down to the middle of nowhere, Louisiana to work as a nurse. And she's got to be thinking, "What the world am I doing here?" Where did you guys meet?

Yeah, she's from my state hometown. A little town called Skaneateles, New York which is a school district we lived in. And she moved there at junior high and that's where I was born and raised in that area.

So you knew her ...

Yeah, we knew of each other. We first dated right when she graduated from the high school, I've been through like freshman year in college and then it was a five-year experience before we were married in '88.

All right, so how long did you coach the golf team?

Three years.

How much do they get better? What was your record?

Yeah. We finished like ... My first year we weren't last.

Yeah.

Which was an accomplishment because they've always been last. And we went in to the final day, it was a twosomes that we played and we're playing south of Austin. And so I had one guy who ... His nickname was Taco, I mean, this is like, there's a movie in here, right?

Yeah.

So Taco says, "Let me go first." He says, "I'm going to play so fast, the guy won't be able to keep up with me, it'll throw off his rhythm." And sure enough, like, he gets up there, he says, "I'm the tee box." He says "Hey, I'm going to play fast tee." He hits his ball across this big canyon that was off the tee to the crane. And then next, it was a par 4 but to the fairway across, the kind of the chasm and the next gets up and just dunks it right in the canyon. And then like the whole team's like, "Hey I think we might not finish last this year. Maybe we can get to 9th out of 10."

And then we got to ... I think we got to like 7th and then we finished 5th and, that no money and no real practice facility. And we never won a tournament, we always ... we finished 2nd like four times. So after my first year, I figured out it's all about scheduling. So we went to a few tough tournaments so that they could play up, but then I was always trying to find one or two where we could win and compete just to build some confidence and we finished 2nd like three times but I never had a victory.

So what happens then? You're there for three years, you're coaching golf, you're doing NCAA work and what's the next step?

Yeah, so there's a guy Britton Banowsky. Britton was assistant commissioner of the Southland. He came in the same month I started as an intern at Northwestern State. Britton eventually

became Conference USA and had just left a couple years ago and now runs the College Football Playoff Foundation but we got to know each other.

And in the fall of '91, he took a job as assistant commissioner with the Southwest Conference, you know, the old Texas-Arkansas Conference. And so there was this opening and I applied and was selected for that job. I did not have a law degree, I interviewed against two attorneys and in the interview process, they said, "Look, we think we need an attorney for this job, why should we even consider you?" Again, the other two candidates had law degrees and I remember my answer started with, "Look, you're going to have to make your own decision. You're right, I don't have a law degree and if I can convince you, you don't need an attorney, I think I've got a really good chance of being your next assistant commissioner," which was kind of just an off the cuff confident statement, not arrogant, but just confident that, "Let me explain to you why I think I'm the person for this job."

So, you know, January of '92, we moved from Natchitoches, Louisiana to the Dallas area, lived in Plano, actually in Allen, Texas and I started as assistant commissioner for the Southland Conference that January. And then, Clay, like every two years, I moved up. So two years later, I became associate commissioner for championships and marketing. Britton Banowsky, Britton had come back as our commissioner. And then two years later when the Big 12 was being started, Steve Hatchell was its inaugural commissioner. He hired Britton and I was 31 years old and they named me commissioner, all the presidents got together, and they decided unanimously. They named me commissioner of that conference without going out doing a further search. They thought they had the right person. And hopefully, they still feel they did the right thing at that point.

So, you're 31 and that's a pretty media work rise, right? To go from an intern...

Yeah.

... in the middle of nowhere in Louisiana and then a golf coach, and at 31, you get named the commissioner of that conference. Were you ready for the job?

I don't think you're ever ready, believe me in my current role. But I was just prepared as you could be at 31 years old, which is, you know, that's not a very sophisticated answer. You know, Clay, what's interesting is two years earlier, the job had come open and people said, "You should apply" and I knew inside that I wasn't ready, it wasn't my time. I actually thought, right or wrong, naively so or just youth that when it came open again, I thought I had a shot it being the commissioner. I'd been around the league office for four years. You know, I've done the regulatory stuff. I kind of knew the issues. I had the ability to think through what needed to be done or what shouldn't have been done. And yeah, I was just ready as could be, you know, where it was a time where like, all the staff took other jobs, I mean, I work like, tirelessly because it's a much smaller operation but you still... I had high expectation of myself even in that moment.

So, for people who aren't familiar with that conference at that time, the schools that are in it are which ones and what, you know, how much of the range geographically did you have to deal with?

Yeah. Sure. It was all... all the Texas... all the schools at that time where either in Texas or Louisiana, so, from Dallas down to San Antonio, and then east through Louisiana. And we had 10 when I started. One was withdrawing. So the University of North Texas withdrew at the end of that academic year, so we were down to 9. And that was, kind of, directional schools in Louisiana plus McNeese State, Nicholls State and then, Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston State, Southwest Texas which is now Texas State, Texas Arlington and Texas San Antonio. So, I'm 31 years old. I got to hire a new staff. And I have expansion put right on my desk from day one. And we added that summer Lamar University and Southeastern Louisiana, went to 11. And so, that's the right number so, you know, we had three other universities or colleges considered, and it was one of those really good decisions for that league, but nobody stops at 11 members. But you know, to your question about, "Were you ready?", I kind of, understood the league and what would work, and what wouldn't work. And, you know, two months in, we made a really positive expansion decision, but I'll just tell you, I was trying to figure it out as much as I was, you know, doing something based on some great knowledge that I gained in my nine-year career.

Male Speaker: Be sure to catch live editions of Outkick the Coverage with Clay Travis weekdays at 6AM eastern, 3AM pacific.

Bob Pittman: Every cultural phenomenon comes down to two things, Math & Magic. I'm Bob Pittman, chairman and CEO of iHeartMedia. And one of the things I've always loved is trying to decode how big ideas find their way into the world. My new show Math & Magic is about those stories. It's about the stories from the frontiers of marketing. Each show I sit down with visionaries to hear how they've use data and creativity to bring incredible ideas to life.

Male Speaker: It was just pure desperation. So I come into the programming meeting and I said, "I got an idea."

Female Speaker: I was fearful that creative executives would see me walk down the hall, and run and hide, because like, "Uh-oh, there's the data nerd."

Male Speaker: Every label would say no to me. You're, like, screw that you're great at marketing but like, it's a YouTube kit, and I say, "Guys, there's a sleeping giant over here, you're not paying attention." I discovered Justin Bieber on YouTube.

Bob Pittman: Listen and subscribe to Math & Magic on Apple podcast via iHeartRadio app or wherever you get your podcast.

We're talking to Greg Sankey, SEC Commissioner. You can follow him on Twitter @GregSankey. So, 31 years old, you're a commissioner of a conference which a lot of people would consider to be an incredible accomplishment by 31. What did your family think at this point in time? Not your wife, but your mom and dad back home in New York, were they blown away by your success? What did they think of this?

I probably found out three years later, I had the ability to buy tickets for the final four and I brought my brother, and my brother lives in Hawaii, he's younger than I am. And my parents to Tampa for the final four, I think it was '99, and we're sitting, like, in these great seats, and that was a year that University of Connecticut and when my dad looks to me and says, "I think you

made the right decision.” Because when I told him that I wasn’t going to be an engineer, he said, “You’re missing the boat. You’re missing the boat.” As I tell you that story, I can smell the... our garage where I told him, the exact spot where I had that conversation. So, in 1990, so I think you made the right decision.

And then, I called him and... there’s another story I want to tell you about the Southland experience that intersects with me being in the SEC, about when I called him to tell him I was leaving the Southland commissioner’s job to take an associate commissioner’s job for the SEC, he said, “Why would you do that?” And he’s like the only person who really ever said it that way to me. Like, “Why would you leave a stable job where you’re the boss?” And you know, that was his frame of reference that I have risen this ladder, I was, you know, paid, you know, well enough and lived in Dallas, which was great, and loves that work but, you know, I was ready for that new challenge which kind of materialized in a phone conversation with Mike Slive one day in August of 2002.

I want to get into that in a sec but I want to go back to you telling your dad you didn’t want to be an engineer. Because I feel, like, there’s a lot of people out there listening right now. Especially, if they’re on the younger side, they’re maybe in college out for the summer listening to this podcast. And when you’re young, a lot of what you do initially is fulfill the expectations and dreams, potentially, of other people, right?

Yeah.

And I think that’s probably somewhat what you were doing, going and becoming an engineer was fulfilling a dream that your dad had for you, how difficult was it for you to tell him that you weren’t going to do, maybe what he thought you should be doing, and become an engineer?

My memory is enormous. You know, just, I’m going to tell him I’m not going to do this because I walked in to, to your, the way you phrase the question, I don’t think I put a lot of thought in to what I was going to major in. It was, “Hey, engineer. You make good money. You’ll always have a job.” I get to go to school in Texas. This is going to be great. I want to go live in Texas and see what life is like there. And, you know, everything worked. But then, what I had to walk through my own, what’s life going to look like, that’s where this other conversation took place almost all internally. My wife and I were dating. I don’t remember she and I have any deep conversations about things. I think there was a time when eventually we talked it through. But I had to walk and say, “Hey, darling, I need to talk to you about something,” and then I said, “You know, I don’t want to be an engineer. I want to work with people,” which is really kind of ironic. I just couldn’t see the people side of being an engineer. Now, I had all kinds of friends with engineering degrees that lead companies or do things with people. But all I saw at that point was, you know, drawings and electrical circuits.

And so, my teaching and coaching was ... I had an uncle who taught and coached and he like had this great-looking life, drove a Camaro which wasn’t the be all and end all for me in the late 70s, but, you know, it’s like, “Hey, you get to work with people.” I love the competitive aspect to sports, I love playing sports, I love thinking it through and watching, and I love the

educational setting. I've never considered professional sports as a career path for me. It's always been in the context of education and that's what really formed that day.

I just didn't know it when we had that conversation. But he never said no. To my dad's credit, he said, you know, "You're missing the boat." He didn't say, "You're making a mistake." I don't know what boat I missed, but I certainly did miss a boat. I will freely renounce that one, but I caught a much better one for me.

So how many hours are you working? So a lot of people want to get that initial job. They don't necessarily work that hard at it because your initial jobs, they may not be great jobs, right? So I mean, when you're grinding, it's not like you're making necessarily really important decisions or things that you think and there's a lot of people listening now who will have been interns. I mean, you're literally the lowest man on the Totem pole, so to speak. How many hours are you working as you work yourself up?

Yeah. The ... In a real job, I track for a while because I was working. I worked all the time and I got up to 80 hours a few weeks when we had a ...

Yeah. I mean, because I think people are hearing that now and they're like, "80 hours as ..." Like you think of a director of intramural sports as like kind of a, not a hardworking job, right, I mean, like for a lot of people, I think. There's some 80 hours there.

Yeah. So I was a one-man show.

Yeah.

So I'm showing up at 10:00 in the morning and, you know, I'd be there until midnight. So those are 14-hour days. You do five of those or four those. You're pretty far down the road for any event. And then you have 80 hours, then you have a few special events over the weekend and that's all you do. And I can remember thinking, man, when I was thinking about not being an engineer, it was because I didn't want to live my life for the weekend. I mean, literally ...

Yeah, right.

... Clay, that those engineering labs, I think about the weekend, I'm like, "This is really a rotten way to live." It's just like the lover boy song working for the weekend, it was popular at the time, you know, like ... And I don't want to live for the weekend. There's got to be something that resonates more. And then all of a sudden, I get this job and I don't even know what a weekend is because it's just constant. But, you know, that prepared me.

So then, when I'm conference commissioner, my first year, I ended up in a hospital because I worked so much and slept so little and didn't exercise. In fact, the story I was going to share, one of them was I was flying here from my first meeting with Roy Kramer in the SEC office, the office that I'm sitting in as we conduct this interview. And it's '87, I'm 32-years-old. I get off a plane in Atlanta. I go to the bathroom at Gate A-26. I mean, I ... The memory is vivid. I'm standing at the urinal doing what one does at the urinal. I get lightheaded and the next thing you know, I hear somebody saying, "Don't worry, sir. Stay on the floor. We've called for help." And like, I'm wondering who he's talking to and I realized I'm on the bathroom floor. And one of

the fundamentals in life is when you're getting up off the bathroom floor, you're never in a good spot in life and mine wasn't like a crazy Saturday night bender or something.

But I had ... My heart freaked out. I had an atrial fibrillation and just ... I went down and then I almost passed out again in the airport. I'm 32-years-old and I spend a night in the hospital. And, you know, I've got a 4-year-old and a 1-year-old and like a \$200,000 insurance policy on myself and it's one of those eye-opening moments about, "Wow, how are you going to live now? You've ground as hard as you can, but you're going to have to take of yourself as well."

What caused that? Was it that you were working? I mean, I don't know enough about the condition there. You faint. But was it brought on by just work to excess? I mean, what did they tell you about how to get better?

Yeah, yeah, it was. Well, we don't really know what triggered it, but your ... It was a vagal nerve. Hopefully, I say it right. You know, it has a function here and they were asking me about sleep patterns and how much caffeine I was consuming and ... The best description is there's a Seinfeld where Kramer gets free lattes.

Yes.

And so, you're doing it all the time. And that was me. I was sleeping like four or five hours a night. I'd wake up. My mind is going 100-miles an hour at 4:00 in the morning. I'd work all day. I'd coach my kids' soccer team at that point. And then, I drink like three and four lattes through the day, like the hyper-cafeination.

And so, we backed it off there. Started to exercise. Paid a little bit more attention to nutrition and learned that I had to rely on my staff a little bit more effectively.

So do you call the SEC when you're going for that interview and say, "Hey, I'm going to have to have to miss it. I'm at the Atlanta Hospital instead because I passed out at the urinal"?

Well, it I wasn't here for an interview. I was here for a meeting.

Oh, okay, so you were...

So the 1-AA commissioners would go around, myself, the Southern conference commissioner, and the Big Sky commissioner. We decided strategically we'd go see the big guys. So Roy Kramer, Jim Delaney, Gene Corrigan was at the ACC, Tom Hanson and just talk about issues because we wanted the guaranteed games, you know, the FCS games ...

Yes.

... everybody complains about. So I was on the other side of that.

Because that would make your budget.

Yeah. It would make your budget and, you know, we were better than Sun Belt schools. I'll just tell you right now that when they were starting football, the Southland schools, we get 3 teams in the 1-AA playoffs and they had a winning record at that time against Sun Belt schools.

So there was some half to it, and we needed to improve the 1-AA Playoffs and talked about where we wanted to be friendly with them. So we were coming here for a meeting, so I literally had to call them and say, "Hey, I'm not going to make it. I'm spending the night in a hospital as it turns out."

What did your wife say when you called, you had to tell?

Well, that's right. When I tell the story in a room of people I say, "Look, if any of you worked for an airline someday, the way to begin the call is not the way it began with my wife which is, 'Hello Mrs. Sankey, this is Mike from Delta Air Lines, have you heard about your husband?'"

And when I was handed the phone I'm in an emergency room and they're going to administer heparin to prevent blood clotting as what they've told me, so I'm all freaked out about having a stroke of some sort, because my heart is not clearing the blood, that it's fluttering as opposed to beating. And I get this phone with my wife, the first thing she said to me is, "What are you trying to do to me?" I'm like, "I'm okay, here's what happened." And she like, "Do I need to come out there?" I'm like, "No, it'll be fine. We'll just ... We'll get through this."

So that was like a Tuesday and then on a Thursday night I was playing in an adult hockey league back in Dallas. And so, she got a little bit riled up because I said, "Well, I'm going to play because I might as well figure out if my heart's going to freak out on me. No better place than on a hockey rink because I've got a helmet and pads on." And I've never had that problem again.

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Male Speaker 3: Let's just ground the conversation for a second. There's 2.2 billion people who use Facebook that's about the size of Christianity. There's 1.9 billion people who use YouTube that's about the size of Islam.

Kara Price: Welcome to Sleepwalkers. A podcast about how technology is changing our lives in ways we don't even notice.

Child: Alexa, how long back did [inaudible 0:52:41] live?

Alexa: Hmm, I don't know that one.

Kara Price: We dig in to the new technology that is altering how we understand the world and ask what effect is it having on us?

Female Speaker 2: Based on what people we're searching for we could direct them to videos on YouTube that countered ISIS' propaganda.

Kara Price: I'm Kara Price. On Sleepwalkers we dive deep into the AI revolution and find out what it means for our future with the people who are building it.

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Male Speaker 4: Like and subscribe to Sleepwalkers on Apple podcasts via iHeartRadio app or wherever you listen to podcasts.

So you ... We circle back around now. We're talking by the way to Southeastern Conference Commissioner Greg Sankey. You're listening to the Wins & Losses Podcast here with Clay Travis.

You get ... So you're the commissioner of the Southland Conference, it is ... Your dad's telling you got the best gig ever. You're showing, taking your family to the final 4 and then you get an opportunity to potentially not be a commissioner anymore and go to the Southeastern Conference, how does that happen?

Right. Yeah, so Mike Slive, if you paid attention closely to the story, Mike Slive and I are on a committee in '97 or in Kansas City and I'd met him once but didn't know him. We're standing off to the side and he says, "Well, tell me your story." So I go through a version of what I've told you here and when I get to the Utica College part he says, "Utica College? I was born and raised in Utica, New York." And I said, "Really?" And he said, "Where did you live there?" And so it started this conversation.

A couple years later he said, "Hey, if you're ever back in Utica, every Saturday night my family used to eat at Joe's Restaurant." And he says, "Here is where it is. It's on Bleecker Street. When you see it, you won't want to go in, but they make their sauce every morning." It was an Italian restaurant.

So Cathy and I were ... We flew at Syracuse. We were driving out to Newport Rhode Island for meetings where Mike and Liz would be attending. They said, "Why don't we leave early and go have lunch at Joe's?" So we did and then I told Mike about doing it and I've told folks. I think that was the most significant decision of my career was to go eat lunch at Joe's because ...

Was it good?

You know, it was great. It was just what it sounds like 10 bucks for a lunch of pasta and a salad and grape sauce and ... So we've started this conversation where we've built a friendship. And about a year and half later, he offered me a chance to work for him at Conference USA and I didn't want to move to Chicago, I really like kind of a leadership position I had.

And then when he came here to the SEC, I was ... John Swofford called me, Tom Hansen, the Pac-12 Commissioner called me and, Mike had said, "I'm going to recommend you be the next commissioner of Conference USA." So I got in the interview process and went through a phone

interview and then like a week went by and I never heard back. So I called Mike and I said, "Hey, what's going on with your old job?" He was here in the SEC office that I'm sitting in right now. And he said, "Look, I've been busy, I haven't paid any attention." And I remember Clay, not believing him, like, "Oh, he's just going to give me the brush off."

Once I got here and saw what it was for him, it was all complete learning experience. He was right. He hasn't thought about Conference USA at all just because his life had been taken over by the SEC. But at the end of the conversation, he said, "Hey, by the way, I've got a job open here and would you ever think about working for the SEC?" And when he tried to hire me at Conference USA, Cathy and I talked and said, "You know what, if it was like the SEC calling for an associate commissioner job, I think I'd take the opportunity." So, it kind of, all this worked together where he and I spent a month talking. It was back in rules compliance, and there were a couple things. One, the SEC had any kind of issues then, you know, we're always going to have issues, but I had a good reputation. I was concerned about, kind of, getting splattered with some of the dirt. I didn't want to be like the enforcement guy, who you just work in compliance and do rules and turfs.

And so, it was really struggle. People, like, you know, I talked to people, they said, "I don't know why you don't want to go there and do that work." And I just got to a point where I was 38, I was still young and had a fourth grader and a first grader. And I executed a strategic plan at the Southland Conference, they were pretty well-positioned. And I could go, like, make another lap on the track. This is literally the conversation I'm having with myself. I love living in Dallas but if I was ever going to take a challenge, you know, it's going... you might as well take a big challenge and try to come here and help in the area that... then he a job opening, it was a big challenge. But it came down to, one of my staff, Linda Tiller [ph 0:57:18] who is now senior associate AD at Florida, asked me this incredibly clarifying question, and it's for young people listening here, "People changing jobs, you're going to have to get to the essence of things if you're going to make a change." And she came in and she's the only one I told on my staff of the opportunity, she said, "Look, if you take this job and in five years you hate it, you'll get a job back at, like, at I-AA school or a conference. You're good enough you'll get that opportunity. But if you stay here, are you going to spend the rest of your life wondering, what if I had just taken that chance?" And she walked out, and I remember, you know, that's exactly right. I'm not going to live the rest of my life wondering if I could have worked at that level. Because when Cathy and I had a conversation about working in college sports, it was... and I wonder how far I might go.

So, moved here in '02, hated it. Just to be honest, it was very different, you know, Mike was trying to figure it out and...

What did you hate about it?

I had been... I led a group of 10 people and got to set an agenda, and when I saw problems, when I asked their opinion or say, "Hey, why don't you go take care of it this way?" and then, all of a sudden, I'm just, kind of, listening and people are looking at me, like, "Why would I listen to you? You were at I-AA." It just... it was, just wasn't comfortable for me. You know, Mike had said, "Hey, we'll work shoulder to shoulder on these issues." And I couldn't capture his attention because we're so busy on other things, like, I felt like, I was alone. So, my first week, I was threatened with lawsuits over a men's tennis tournament issue. And I flew back to

Dallas, my wife picks me up, because I was commuting at that point, she said, "What happened?" I told her. And she said, "Did you used to get threatened with lawsuits at the Southland Conference?" I said, like, in six years I had one time. And so I got threatened with three lawsuits over men's tennis. I said, "I can't imagine what if it's football issues." So that started the misery.

The second week was... I forgot the name of the quarterback at LSU but Saban said he was nervous, wanted his brother on the sideline, and we said, no, I said, "No, you can't do that." You can't take a family member and just put him on the sideline.

And then the third week was my first phone call with Jim Harrick, which didn't go well because, like, three months later, is when he got fired in February of '03. So, you're dealing with all these issues. I didn't have the knowledge base to really solve problems quickly. We had some staff turnover. So I was back in that absolute grind. I took a pretty significant pay cut to take the opportunity here. So, you know, I said earlier that I always try to put money in the background, and I ask myself, "Would I be moving into a situation that would challenge me so that I can learn and grow?" I mean, that was the template that I applied. And every year, I ask myself the same question, like, I'm about to go through that process over the next couple of weeks when I've got a little bit quieter time, "Am I still growing?" And the answer is yes in this job, certainly.

But, you know, making that move, there were just a lot of stuff and the unsettledness in trying to figure it out that were really, really difficult.

How did Nick Saban respond when you told him he couldn't have the brother on the sidelines?

I think that was the end of it, you know. It's interesting that all through the years and you obviously have a different relationship when you're the commissioner and the coach. But Nick has always been pretty direct both ways, both, you know, giving and taking. And I respect that. No, no hidden agendas, just very clear conversations back and forth.

Male Speaker 1: Be sure to catch live editions of Outkick the Coverage with Clay Travis weekdays at 6AM eastern, 3AM pacific.

Marc Murphy: Hi, this is Marc Murphy. And I'm the host of a new podcast from iHeartRadio called Food 360. Some of you may know me as a chef in a New York restaurant tour. Maybe you recognize my voice as one of the judges on Food Network's Chopped. I've been cooking for over 30 years, but I'm not done learning about food yet, and you should be either. Join me as we take a 360 degree look at history, science, culture, and more all through the lens of food.

Female Speaker 1: It's about sugar weight and understanding mylar effect and its chemistry. It is protein, and fat, and heat.

Marc Murphy: I was a American chef opening a restaurant in New York City which was highly unusual.

Male Speaker 3: Very new, right?

Marc Murphy: I was like the new animal in the zoo, you know. Let's go see that new animal.

Male Speaker 3: Is he striped?

Marc Murphy: Exactly.

Female Speaker 1: When you're writing the recipe itself, don't be flowery, don't be purple, get that information across. Really, what's writing on your recipe is someone else's dinner.

Marc Murphy: Be sure to subscribe to Food 360 on the iHeartRadio app, Apple podcast, or wherever you're listening to your favorite shows.

You mentioned taking a pay cut. And there are a lot of people listening right now and we're talking to SEC Commissioner, Greg Sankey. This is the Wins & Losses podcast with Clay Travis.

A lot of people out there would, and I think in life in general, don't make a decision because they can't bear to go back in pay, right? It's very, very common. I've done it a bunch of times in my career where I've thought, "Hey, I like the opportunity." I did it when I decided to give up practicing law which a lot of people... You said you had a conversation with your dad. I mean, a lot of people thought I was crazy, you know, graduating from Vanderbilt Law School and writing a book about SEC Football. Like why was I not in the law firm? What was I doing with my life?

And I have found that if you take the job that always offers you the most money, sometimes you have ... Maybe not even sometimes, but every often, you end up trapped at some point, right, because there's always an opportunity to make a little bit more money.

Were you cognizant of that? Because I mean, that's not necessarily a traditional path to go somewhere and take less money for probably a more challenging situation.

Yeah. I was attentive to it and, you know, that created some stress here. You know, the cost of living was a bit higher than Dallas. The real estate market is different. And I was good at math, but not great at math. So, you know, I was a little bit lean when I made the move.

And you've got a young family and you've got a wife, so ...

Yeah.

So ... And, people, if you're in Birmingham, they don't think of it as being an expensive place, but it can be pretty expensive. I mean, there's a lot of rich people in Birmingham.

Yeah. And in Dallas, for \$200,000 you get a huge house. For \$200,000 here, you're going to spend every weekend fixing your house.

Yeah.

And, you know, I didn't have that time because of the demands of the job. But I think there's two keys in there. One, yeah, I was conscious about, "Hey, I'm going to take a hit monetarily." And two of the most significant decisions I ever made, taking that internship. So I went ... It was actually \$21,000 that year at Utica because I had that for about a month and then left in July after getting the raise down to six. And then ...

That's crazy.

Yeah. From 175 down to 125 to move to the SEC. So that's like a 33% pay cut. And then, in both of those circumstances, I went back from a responsibilities, prestige title, whatever, you know, I was in, you know, I was an intern, so I was like writing letters and sealing envelopes and managing tickets and then I was in compliance here as opposed to being a commissioner.

And, you know, part of the reason it was hard is, you know, I had to be reminded to put my ego in the drawer and, you know, do the job. And actually, Clay, after a year-and-a-half, I had pursued an athletic director's job and was actually ... I had accepted the athletic director's job at Colgate University. And on the morning of the press conference, I didn't sleep for two nights. I called the president of the university and said, you know, "We need to cancel that press conference." So whether it's Bobby Cremins, Billy Donovan, and whoever has one of those things, I was on that list. I had to call Mike and I asked for my job back here and ...

Oh, we got to go. We got to go into this. So you get ... So you were there for a year-and-a-half and then you get an opportunity to go to Colgate back in the Northwest where you and your family were from.

Yeah.

I mean, that's a pretty prestigious school, right? I mean, that's a job that is a really, a pretty ... I would imagine, sought-after job. You go through the interview process. And by the way, one question before I get to there.

Did you ever find out why you didn't get the Conference USA job?

Yeah. They said ... The search consultant said, "You can't handle this job. You've never been in a big enough setting." And to that, I was ready for that because it had happened once in like a preliminary to get to know you for another commissioner's job. I said, "Wait a second. What's harder to manage? To get the Southland Conference Basketball Tournament back on ESPN after you predecessor hacked them off and they wouldn't talk to you for four years, three years or to schedule the Duke North Carolina on the ESPN because you ... The guy who was the consultant works for the ACC?" Because I had to do the latter and I can tell you, that's a lot more difficult now.

You know, they made their decision that worked pretty well for me.

So, yeah, no kidding. So, okay. So you get the ... You're thinking, "Okay, this SEC thing may not be working out." You take the job. You had to go through the interview process, I

imagine, in order to get that job. And then, are you up in like the vicinity? You have to be in the community, right, to be ready to walk over to the press conference.

Oh, yeah. I've gone through two interviews. I was up there with my family. I met the trustees which are significant people like ... Now, the CEO of Formula One right now, again, is Chase Carey. He was with the board. Chase Carey was the primary trustee for my interview.

Oh, Chase Carey was like one of the top guys that Fox ...

Fox, yeah.

[Inaudible 1:06:54] Rupert Murdoch, right?

He was running DIRECTV at the time when we had this conversation.

Wow. Yeah.

So I mean, there were substantive people. Like I think Marc Murphy who's now the president of the Green Bay Packers had left the job that's why it was open. He went to Northwestern University. So I could see, go to this great university, it's about 40 ... You know, Colgate University is about 40 miles from my family, my wife's family. My kids would get to know their grandparents, which they hadn't had that opportunity. They had just gone to the National Championship game in 1-AA football. Their hockey team was top 10 at the time. So their ... you know, there's some opportunities there and I had a friend in the Patriot League, the AD of Buck now, who just described it as a great career experience.

And I was up there. I'd met the trustees. I'd sent my family back to Birmingham to finish school. I was, you know, there on my own, I didn't sleep. I was literally clamped on my knees praying, "God, what do I do?" and made the decision that I was going to have to get up in the morning. I told Mike I was resigning. The SEC membership had been told that, so they wouldn't be caught off-guard by the announcement on Monday. And I called him and said, "Hey, this isn't going to work, Mike. I really would like to stay if you'll have me back." He had been the AD of Cornell and then kind of advised me that wasn't a high point for him and you know, he said, "You know, you've done something that I didn't do which was to walk away from the situation that didn't work." And then I had to call the college from university president and say, "You know, you need to cancel the press conference." And then I just shut my phone off for like 6 hours.

I told my wife and it was emotional for her because she thought, you know, we were ...

She wanted you to take the job?

Well, we had walked through this process for a couple of months where ...

Yeah.

It was like this is the right thing to do and then all of a sudden, I call up on a Monday morning at 6:30 am and say, "We're not moving and here's why." And then I ... I just shut my phone off

and just went away and I sat by the lake and just kind of processed. And it was an important moment for my success here because I see, “You know what? I haven’t let myself enjoy the job. I was so uptight about going to the coaches’ meetings or what was the next issue.” I said, “I’m going to go and have fun.” And then I’m going to walk in to the football coaches’ meeting in Dustin [ph 1:09:18], so this was ’04 and I’m going to make everybody in that room smile at least once and just have fun.

And it was a turning point for me. I began to enjoy the work a lot more, appreciated the level, the intensity and the people in a whole fresh way.

So what was it at Colgate that ultimately do you think attributed to you not sleeping for two nights, like, was it just a career trajectory? Was it ... What was it that sort of in the back of your mind you were like this is just not right?

Yeah, it was an accumulation of things there. I should’ve pulled out two or three weeks earlier, I was kind of told here’s how salary conversations would go, and I had reasonable expectations and I had taken the pay cut to come to the SEC. So I was looking to make a step forward and it didn’t play out, just mechanically the way it has been explained to me and that was a warning flag.

We made a visit up there, where they were going to let us live in a ... in some campus housing that I had certain expectations on how my family would live not overly, you know, elite but we weren’t even close to what we saw that day. It was really a shock and my wife and kids were looking at me like, “God, I don’t think we’re going to really live here and a great ... Have a great experience.”

Yeah.

We walk into the school. It was a bit of a disaster. There was kind of a blip and a budget circumstance, I’m like, “Wait a second, it’s ... If this is the way it is now when they’re happy with me, what happens after a few years when they’re a little bit tired of seeing the AD roll in?” We’re all in and probably just came in to my senses to what I should’ve seen three weeks ago but I wanted it to work. And it was a really good lesson for me and some other opportunities that I didn’t pursue or stopped at the right time. And I think everybody has to go through those, you know, kind of your point about transitioning from a law firm, well, then you get in to something right and you learn a little bit. So for the next time you have an opportunity, you know a little bit better how to discern, whether it’s a yes or no or what questions to ask.

And Colgate is a great place, they’ve had great success, the men’s basketball team gave Tennessee a tough game in the NCAA tournament, but it just wasn’t the right situation for me even though I thought for months that it would be.

So then you go back to the SEC and basically say “I’m going to commit myself to this job.” When did you start thinking, “Hey, maybe one day I could be the successor to Mike Slive” or were you thinking that for the moment you first started working at the SEC?

No, I came here with the idea I could go to the Sun Belt or Conference USA or the Mid-American Conference. Things have changed where you aren't going to jump that didn't seem from 1-AA and do a 1 A situation or from FCS to FBS.

And so, in like '09, the Mid-American Conference commissioner's job came open and I went through that process, had a great visit with the search committee. And it was in March ... I thought that was the opportunity, I've been invited back as one of two finalists and they wanted me to sign a memorandum of understanding before I could go to the final interview. And in the Colgate situation, that had come up and I never signed the memorandum and then I was able to walk away. And so, I said, look, there were some financial things I need a clarity on and I just said, I'm not going to sign an MoU. It hadn't been presented to me by the search firm upfront. And said, "I'll go into the interview but if somebody is like, really, unpleasant to me in the interview process, then I walk..."

Is that basically, you're saying that you would accept the job if it got offered to you as if...

Yeah.

... they're asking you to do it?

Yeah, yeah. I mean, that's part... Some search firms function that way. And so, I said, I'm not going to sign the MoU. And it kind of, we went back and forth probably 48 hours, and it was probably one time where I said, you know, there was... It's a pretty good salary jump from where I was and talked it through here and got a little bit more. And maybe, Clay, that was the first time I ever thought about, you know, what happens when Mike Slive decides to step away, and he and I had... It's just a conversation about one of the reasons I'm thinking about going to the Mid-American Conference is, you know, you work five more years or so and then, I'd be a candidate as opposed to being an internal candidate, potentially having multiple internal candidates. And he encouraged me to rethink that, and I did. And you know, the rest is history as they say, but it wasn't quite as easy a decision in the moment.

All right. So, while you're at the SEC, working there, what would you say your expertise became? On a day-to-day basis, you would, I'm sure, take care of a lot of different things, but what did you find as you, kind of, found your footing after you came back from that Colgate job was sort of your wheel house that you think you contributed the most to the conference in?

Wow, that's like... that's a question. You know, I had this regulatory compliance legislative role and threw myself into what I think was pretty good of what was ... what was happening actually in that regard on being ahead of it, but also thinking of... and understanding what was happening on our campus. You know, I still think I understand not at a level of detail if I lived on one of our campuses, but I know how our people think. And that is an asset. And that's one that comes of having now been here for 16 and a half years.

And then, I think, I say this with a level of humility, I think I was at more benefit to Mike than I understood at the time because he gave me permission to be just completely honest with him, and I was good at playing that role, not because of anything in particular, maybe just

personality to say, "Hey, did you think about at this way?" And he'd tell me I have and I'm going this direction or that's a really bad suggestion. But from my perspective, we had a really, really effective working relationship.

What was it like during expansion? So, you end up adding Missouri and Texas A&M. I'm guessing that's probably by far, the craziest time in your time in the SEC office. Would that be fair to say? What was that process like from your perspective?

Yeah, I think that the year before, people forget that 2010 was when the pack 10 looked at becoming the pack 16.

Right. They were going to add Texas, they were going to add A&M, Oklahoma...

Right.

... Oklahoma State, and all those teams for the big 12.

Yeah. And expansion among us all was relatively quiet at that time. And then, it just, kind of, goes. And how did we respond? You know, we're more the recruiters, like, everyone else was. And 12 worked... worked really well. We had just gone through TV renegotiation in 2008, that was beneficial with the huge expansion in ESPN revenue, the continuity with CBS. And so then, 11 comes, and it was first A&M as people recall, and yeah, there was just a level of intensity around that, experienced from, what, you know, August and then September when it was announced. And then, on the other side of the announcement was scheduling for a 13-league team, which we were prepared to be, come 2012. And then, the Missouri addition in November, kind of after, you'd have some of these 13 team plans settled. At the same time, there is this network talk that was in the background that was bubbling. And you know, yeah there was an intensity but then I think the intensity ramped up after expansion because you had the need to schedule, to orient, to learn, to accommodate, adjust, also you got meetings with two new... to universities represented. They're learning you. You're learning them.

And, you know, now, we're in the 12, and so, the network idea which had been there in '07, '08 but not, you know, pursued is now it has a new life, and you know, you work from expansion, into transition, and then into how to launch a conference network. So, that was a really set of intense years where you never had a business as usual experience.

How does schools reach out when, you know, when conference realignment is going on, is that something where you've got a friend who is... who is in a school and he calls you up, and it's like, "Hey, would you be interested if this possibility came out? Like, how do you become aware of what your options are, and the contacts are? Because it's a complex, process, right? I mean, nobody wants... it's like you don't want to try to get into a conference until you know they'll have you, but how do you know whether a conference can have you? I'm fascinated by the whole process by which that takes place.

That formula is locked in a ball behind the steel doors with secret combinations that only I know. And so, you know, it's... it varies, I think, because you really look across the landscape. So, you look at, at the pack 10 experience, there were consultants involved, the outreach, hours where people... where people calling here or intermediaries to say, "Hey, they'd be

interested.” And obviously, there’s a lot of care. Missouri and [inaudible 1:19:30] and I, we’re both members of the American Association of University, it’s a prestigious research university. They’re in contiguous states, stand bases that are similar with metropolitan area, so there are very few who really fit that, but we were never the recruiting entity in those processes, and at least in the 2011, 2012 timeframe.

How do you deal with leaks? Like, that still exist now that you’re the commissioner of the conference, but I remember...

Yeah.

... and I’m sure you do as well, the news officially came out when the SEC accidentally had a staged page, right, on for Missouri announcing that Missouri was going to be the 14th member of the SEC.

Yeah.

And somebody sent that to me, and I remember writing about it and being like, “Oh this is amazing.” But it had quotes from, you know, a bunch of different people, like, it was set and ready to roll. But how did... you know, when there’s that much interest, right? And for people who don’t remember listening to us right now, I mean, realignment was absolute fever-pitched crazy. It combines at, you know, business, politics, certainly the money aside, the conference growth, everything. I mean, this is as big of a story as you can get. How do you handle something like that?

Well, very carefully so I wasn’t not...

Like, how many people do you think...

... the commissioner at the time. You know, the leak is, you know, Mike...

Yeah.

Mike was... One of the things, I learned a lot from working with Mike, one of those great privileges of my career. You know, for me, personally, there are two things that really helped me. One, I was in charge of the conference, and so you realize how different it is to be the decision maker at the end of the hall, even in a small setting. And the second was just to work with him and see how he functioned. And you know, you’re going to be protective of information. And I’ve forgotten about that webpage piece but...

Oh, yeah.

...that’s a pretty good ... that’s a... it brought shock to my face. But now...

What’s your reaction when you see that the Missouri joining the SEC webpage has leaked?

As you said it, I'm recalling somebody came into my office because, you know, at that time I was an associate commissioner. I had not been named the chief operating officer. My title hadn't bumped up. So, I have a role, but it wasn't like what it became. And I'm like, "You're... you've got to be kidding me, how does that happen?" And you know, you kind of stayed away from Mike's office at that point. But they had left, kind of, whatever... whatever pure, you know, be delivered, where it needed to be delivered. And then I come, kind of, clean it up. It's... but on the other hand, there are things that are reported, where you're like, that's not true. I once sat behind an army general reading USA Today in an NCAA meeting and I said, "You know, at the athletics, we have these things that are leaked or anonymous sources say, and you're like, half of it is just wrong." I said, "What's it like in the military as during the... the original Desert Storm?" He said, "Oh, it's the same thing?"

Yeah.

So, you know, we have to be careful because, especially in the Southeastern Conference, there's so much interest in what we do that it is, you know, you lose opportunities, you can lose value, you can lose options if it all plays out in the media.

And we just walk through this discussion of alcohol that went on for a long period of time this past year. And we had a working group look at it, but I'd say continually to our membership, if you want to debate this in the newspapers, all that will do as harden people's position on both ends. And if we want to work through this collaboratively, we have to do it without leaks and anonymous sources. And, you know, we were pretty good for about 51 weeks there, before it became a topic as we had it in the desk then, which we knew it would become. And really, the essence of your question is, you know, "How do you react to leaks? How do you deal with it?" You know, you try to manage it upfront, not because you're trying to be deceitful or overly protective but because you have to have room and freedom, and space to do the work of the conference.

So, Mike Slive, you had the expansion occur and then, he tells you... when did you become aware that he was planning on stepping down? Did he call you into his office and tell you? What was that process like for you?

Well, remember Mike's prostate cancer reared up in a really, really dramatic way in the summer of '14. And I think it's probably in September where he and I run back and forth to places he loved, where I really understood the gravity of the situation. And I had had another opportunity of a substance present itself in college athletics, and all of a sudden, you know, a guy to whom I'm loyal, a conference that's been a good place for me, and it's a little bit undefined. And remember, this is the summer of 2014. So, we're launching a network, you know, distribution is a question. As we go into July and then things started to break right around media days with Comcast. We had DISH and AT&T, U-verse up front, you know, Comcast.

You got DirecTV barely before the actual [inaudible 1:24:51].

Yeah, Direct TV came on that night which is what I have. So, we were fully distributed with the exception of what was then Cablevision in New York City. And we're now on its successor Altis. So, you had that, like, what's going to happen. You have the launch of the network and game schedule differently. Is anybody going to watch SEC Nation, and then, then, Mike just had this

health reality. And you know, retirement I think, well, he had said it's been on his mind during that summer for the next year. And that announcement came out in October that he would be retiring, and you know, he's going through that chemo battle just... he's tough as nails. He had... Just watching those treatments and what it would do and people who've had, you know, friends or family members with ... or colleagues fight cancer know how hard that battle could be, but just the spirit that was remarkable to watch.

And then, for me, in October, also and I became like the number one ranked team in the country. And I was kidding with Cal Perry because that year, Kentucky went undefeated until the semis nationally. And so, people say, "Well, it's going to be Greg Sankey" and that was never the deal. You know, Nick Zeppos was the Chair of our Presidents and Chancellors and he was great to say, "We're going to go through a full search. That's in the best interest of the conference and frankly that's the right thing for you. A lot of people think highly of you. You'll be a candidate."

And then it was a really intense time of preparation like how do you see this conference in the future. And so, I had my day job to do. We all shared a little bit more because we wanted to make sure Mike was well supported and his schedule is different as he went through his health battle. And then, I was trying to prepare materials in how do you communicate about the future of the Southeastern Conference.

And it was like the posture or the question to me was how do you take the SEC to the next level. And I, like, like process that for a couple of weeks because I've always thought of us as being in the next level. We want to be the Jones' that the people are keeping up with. And it's not just easy to say, "Okay. We're going to do this. We're going to do that." You can't control competitive outcomes or TV contracts or sets. So, how do you think in a big picture way about the SEC?

And that became every waking moment where I wasn't on the job was me with an orange notebook talking to people, thinking about ideas. Where my kind of pitch came was literally on a Southwest Airlines flight, writing an idea down on napkins because I forgot my orange notebook. That eventually formed the presentation I made during the interview process.

And you see on our championship signage some of the words about scholars, champions, and leaders, just conveying that here's what we're trying to do as a league. And if we do it well, we're going to have TV contracts and interest and viewership and fans attending games.

So that probably... I just veered from the essence of the question, Clay, but it that's ... It was a year of concern for a friend, first and foremost, but also recognition that, "Okay. Here's your opportunity. You don't want to go into that interview wondering have I done everything I could to prepare." And so, I spent a lot of time thinking, preparing for what might be next.

Where were you when you found out that you got the job?

I was in Nashville. There were... I went through three interviews, in-person interviews, the last with all of our presidents and chancellors. It was at the formal residence of the Vanderbilt Chancellor. They have a place that is hospitality-related and all that.

So, I went through an interview on a Thursday morning at like 8 o'clock for two hours.

What's that interview like, they grill you, anybody can ask any question? Is it structured? What's that process like?

Yeah. I was sitting, you know, they probably, I was sitting on a couch and everybody got to ask questions one after the other. And the couch, it was an older couch. I remember sitting up high. I have a picture on my phone and 14 presidents and chancellors on chairs surrounding me in a semicircle and it was kind of one question after another.

And then, we had breakfast together where there's more questions and a little bit less formal setting and then I left. I went back to the Renaissance downtown and I was kind of processing what just happened. And I went into a meeting because I had to go back at noon for the formal regular meeting of our presidents and chancellors.

So, it's about 10:30. I go back. I walk in. Mike text me, "What's going on?" And I said, "Hey, I'm back in the hotel." Like, "Where are you?" and so he's asking me questions. And I walk into this room of colleagues, people kind of knew what was going on, but they did a really good job, our presidents, of keeping matters confidential. And then, I felt like dead man walking and like, "What's happening?"

And so, I kind of assumed if it was me, it would happen quickly. I'd get a phone call. And then, like an hour goes by and there's no phone call. I'm like, "Wow. This is interesting." I then had to get back in a car and ride back out to the same location for our formal regular business meeting of the presidents and chancellors. I hadn't heard a thing.

And Mike was in the passenger seat and his executive assistant now who works as my executive assistant was driving and I'm in the back. I'm in a pretty good mood. I'm like, "Hey, I did the best I could. We'll see what happens." And I kind of went on a downward spiral of "Man, if I don't get this, what's going to happen? I'm going to go on to the next part of my career" and like the dark clouds started to hover.

And, Clay, I told that story like six months later, Herb Benson our Associate Commissioner for Communications said, "Hey, I was in the backseat with you." And I'm like, "Seriously, you were?" He's like, "Yeah. I rode in that same car out to that meeting." I'm like, "Herb, I don't remember you being there at all on that ride," because your mind just kind of takes over.

And so we pull up, I looked at Katherine who would help administratively with the search, I said, "What am I supposed to do?" And she said, "I don't know." And so, it's one of those moments where you decide who you are and I said, "You know what?" The best I could, I walked up the stairs with my head held high and Nick Zeppos comes out and says, "Greg, come with me," and brings me in a side room with a couple of other presidents and chancellors. I sit down and he says, "Congratulations. We want you to be our next commissioner." And like the world changed. And he kind of talked about structure of an agreement and then he said, "What do you think?" And the first thing I said was, "I just need a moment to tie my shoe. My shoe had come untied." And I had some things that I wanted to talk

through, but I needed to stop the world from spinning as quickly as it becomes spinning. So I went through that...

Did you think they might tell you that you weren't going to get the job when they pulled you into the side room then?

Yeah. I walked down the hallway with no idea what was about to happen. And I credit – it wasn't any fun, but it was a very thorough search. I mean, it was...

Do you know if they interviewed other people that day, too?

Sure. There were other finalists. I know of that.

Yeah. And...

It was, you know, Jed Hughes and he was just involved in the big 10 search, had led the search for Korn Ferry and that's a big-time company and they involved all kinds of people. That's their job. And that's what our presidents and chancellors wanted for their consideration.

So, how much... So, I remember talking to you soon after you got that. And you said almost immediately as you rise up to that level, you realized how much difference there was between being the number two guy and being the number one guy. You know, in other words, let's say you're number two to Mike Slive at that point. The distance between number one and number two geographically may not have been very much in terms of your office in moving down the hall and everything else. But how much difference was there and how much difference did you suddenly have? I feel like this is a long question, but you don't know what it's like to be a parent until you actually become a parent.

Right.

And then you go back, and you tell your own parents, like, you know what, you guys did a pretty good job, right? I mean, that's the ideal scenario. But you always, kind of, know what the process of being a kid is like. Could you have prepared? What was it like to suddenly become the commissioner of the SEC?

Yeah, so, as I gather thoughts in really answering that question. Mark Richt, as he left Georgia, made an observation that's very simple. He says, "You don't know what it's like to sit in the chair until you sit in the chair." And that's the answer to your question which is, I was 50 yards from this office as executive associate commissioner, but I was 50,000 miles away, as far as rigor, and focus, and pressure, and expectations. And I was as close to Mike as you could be in a day-to-day basis but still didn't have the level of understanding of what it's really like. And you don't have that until you're in it.

The advantage that I have for myself is, a lot of what happened, starting June 1st, 2015 where people come to you with ideas, and then you have to make a decision is mentally, I live through that in the Southland Conference. I'm off Broadway. I can make decisions that maybe could be highly criticized. They weren't because there just wasn't the visibility. But the mental process

of listening to input and then making a decision is very different from being an advisor. And that's what happens when you go from two or associate commissioner to commissioner, as you went from being an adviser to being the decision maker. And, Clay, that's just... that's a world... a world of difference.

And you know, for me, we had some TV allocations that hit me in the first week. The second week, there is the tragic shooting in Charleston and South Carolina, and a flood of questions here about the Confederate battle flag display in South Carolina and then the state flag in Mississippi, and then what are you going to say publicly. You know, there's not a master's class that prepares you for those experiences. And those are, like, two of the quick ones but then budget decisions, personnel decisions, you can have a plan which is what I worked on. But then, you know, it's kind of, a Mike Tyson, everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face. And I'm going to do all these in the first year, and I probably got through half of what I thought I'd get through, just because, you know, the day-to-day takes over as well.

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So, you get the job and you are in... and I'm fortunate to know you, I think, pretty well, you're forward thinking, right? You're trying to think about not just the things that are going on right now, but also the things that might come in the future. And I remember having conversations when I wrote and talked some with Mike Slive about how he's sort of viewed the SEC as a public trust, right? You're trying to think about things that are going to leave that conference in better shape in the years and decades ahead than it was when you took over.

How much time now do you spend thinking about the day to day mechanics of running a conference, versus decisions now that you want to make, that are going to be putting the conference in a better shape, five to ten years in the future. What... or in a day to day basis now, what is your focus?

It's more down the road. There's always going to be operational elements and a leadership, kind of, chief executive officer position. My first summer, one of the things I was encouraged to do by our president and chancellors is to go engage with a leadership consulting program of some sort. And I ended up with Deloitte Consulting has a CEO transition program. Usually, it's about Fortune 500 CEOs, but it's about clarity of your vision, focus. And part of that question was really, what would they ask me, which is how much time do you spend on strategy and

operations versus vision and planning? And the challenge is to move the vision and planning so you're always looking... you're looking forward.

And when you're an internal candidate, you've been dealing with operations, right for you know, years. And you have to move away from that. Well, that takes a little bit of time. If you're an external person, you know nothing about the operation so you're learning that. And you may even have CEO experience so, I don't... I actually like the internal part because I could get after some of the immediate needs, as opposed to having to figure it out for a couple of years.

I spend more time now looking down the road, you know, five years. And I've spent time after my first or second year trying to engage in more learning about what is the future really look like be it media, be it trying to understand litigation outcomes, be it what's happening in higher education enrollment patterns economically in our region, you know, understanding changes in culture around media consumption, event attendance. And you know, there are a set of issues that just in the last four years, well, it's a very different than they did again, June 1st, 2015, when I started my first day in this role. And you can't spend your day just trying to figure out your org chart. You better be thinking about what it is that's around the corner even though we can't see it.

One of those that's been widely successful is the SEC Network, I mean, you guys hit it out of the park on the launch. You guys and ESPN put it together about as well as it possibly could have gone. No one missed any games, there was no disruption in the SEC fan base. You thought you might have to fight a battle, but it ended up that you just had to line up and execute a great business plan. But the challenge that you have now is, SEC network has got cord-cutting issues just like ESPN and FS1 and NBC Sports Network, and every other cable channel out there. Now, are you concerned at all about the cable bundle in a way that maybe you didn't think you would have had to be in 2015?

I don't know. I'm attentive to the cable bundle but there are still advantages that seemed to be inherent. But there's... there's clearly some point out there, this tipping point it seems, where there's so much, either direct consumer or skinny bundle or these new providers and the ins and out ability that is raises the issue I think first of connection to your fan base I think even more than content.

The content has to be great. Live events are important. But keeping our conference relevant, making sure our fans are a part of what we do and connects us our games in our events, I think all of that is important to kind of feed what we've built. And, sure, there are changing dynamics around media and television, but there's a big picture of – if people are connected to what we do and it's compelling and the competition is at a high, high level, it continues to attract people. Now, how that's delivered is part of the execution where we need great partners like we've had executing well.

And you've got ESPN as a great partner that's lined up for a long time with the SEC Network. The SEC Game of the Week on CBS has turned into an also widely popular television platform. And you guys have been with CBS for a long time.

I think that deal is up. You'll know better than me. In 2024-ish, the 2024 football season, I think, do you already now we're talking – and I hope people are still listening to this years

from now, but it's 2019 now. Do you look ahead and already start planning out what might make sense there? Do you think about direct-to-consumer on your Game of the Week, your SEC championship game? Is that one of the things that you would explore as part of that process kind of looking forward?

I have a long view of that next opportunity. So, that, the CBS relationship has been enormously important to this Southeastern Conference and can continue to be. We do have five more full seasons remaining and appreciate that relationship.

But to your earlier question, I look out in the future and that's why we engaged a media adviser. So, Chuck Gerber who did great work for us in our prior negotiations in '08, the launch of the SEC Network, we lost Chuck in November of 2015. So, we've needed someone to fill that advisory role.

I don't have anything imminent but I want to be thinking again long term how does the industry change, who's involved in negotiations right now that understands the business and that's why in November of last year, we announced a relationship with Evolution Media and CA Television to help us in that thinking and preparation, but that's very much a long view of the opportunity. That, hey, it'll be out there at some point in the next five years and we want to make sure we're as well prepared as anyone.

One of the things I'm sure that's impressed you about being the SEC Commissioner is suddenly if you didn't already know the number of people in meetings you can get in for and I know you've met for instance with Tim Cook who is a big Oberlin supporter, who are some of the names and people that you have met who have SEC alumni relationships who cared deeply about the results of college conference football, basketball, baseball, whatever it may be that maybe surprised you?

And I imagine it's going to be a little bit crazy to walk in to meet with a guy like Tim Cook who's been in charge of a trillion-dollar company and he's caring about how Oberlin football is going to go which I think just kind of speaks to the fabric with which SEC football connects even after people may not necessarily be that connected to their alma mater anymore, right? It really is the tie that binds forever.

Yeah. It is and I've met Tim a number of times. When I had an opportunity for one-on-one, I said, "Do you like..." this was in the summer, I said, "Do you know that you'll be able to watch Oberlin football games on the phone?" He's like, "Oh, yeah."

Like he plans around that to make sure he's going to watch...

Yeah, like kind of, it wasn't – it's a clear passion which is great. That's part of the – it just means more attitude we've communicated.

Charlie Ergen who had DISH as a Tennessee alum and just fascinating to talk to and really, I've taken time to meet with as media leaders as I can, and their schedules don't work. And even whether they're alums or not, I'm amazed that the number who might not be alums whether its children have attended one or more of our universities. But they're all conversant. And you can say, you know, like, "What are we doing right in the SEC Network," and everyone talks about

SEC Nation on Saturday mornings where you got this flavor of who we are. And that's the attachment to the Southeastern Conference.

I was sharing earlier today with a friend that I'll meet senators and Congressional representatives in games and I've literally had conversations of, "Hey, if you're ever in DC, I'd love to have dinner." They're saying this to me. I'm like, "Yeah. You're busy and I don't want to impose." They say, "No. No. I would love to have dinner with you and talk about your work."

And I think that's maybe an illustration of it's this passion that is generally a very healthy passion that provides a little bit of diversion and attachment to home, to something that means, something special from a time in their life or from someone, a parent who may have been an alum or just – that that was the university and its team that was kind of the city on a hill to which everybody paid attention in their youth.

So, there are any number of those. I'm probably ill-equipped to run down the list or somebody made me sign a confidentiality. I'm not kidding about the latter.

All right. So, that is impressive in and of itself. Also, stepping up from the number two to the number one seat though will put your own life into the public eye in a way that it was never when you're number two, right?

Right.

When you go up to number one, suddenly, you're the guy who James Carville is taking shots at on college game day or you're the guy who replaces Mike Slive's name in any number of message boards when people are complaining about a subtle change that they think impacts the competitive spirit of the conference or everything else.

How has that felt to you to go from, I mean, I know you had a public job for people who were in the industry. But now, you have a public-public job where people know your name and know what you do and holds you accountable for so many things on a day-to-day basis that you might have been involved in before, but you certainly weren't considered responsible for.

Yeah. I had a conversation with Roger Goodell where we're just talking about officiating and he said, "Everybody needs somebody to blame," and unfortunately that becomes us in these roles.

Yeah.

And what I found is I'm accountable not so much for what I do but for what everybody around me does. But somebody is going to point the finger and you're at a leadership level where you assume responsibility. And I don't think anyone can step in to it and really understand the level of attention and scrutiny.

And there's good and bad to that. Some of the things that happen in social media are kind of past disturbing. And some of the accusations just have to anchor in reality but people want to communicate their frustrations or perceptions.

In the public realm, I think 99% of the interaction I have has been positive. In fact, there's a basketball tournament this year and I had a graduate of one of our universities who grabs my arm and said, "I'm from..." and I'm like, "Oh, no here we go." And he said, "I just want you to know that there are a lot of us out here who are reasonable people and respect fully the job that's in front of you and how you handle it. And I said, "You know what, you have no idea how incredibly kind that is."

Because what people don't see in these leadership roles is that we are human beings making informed decisions but we're all going to do the best we can in... Maybe we don't make the perfect decision, but it may have been the best decision given the circumstances. That then creates perceptions, and everybody has emotion and feelings around it which is great. But fundamentally, we're committed to acting with integrity in making the best-informed decisions as possible. And sometimes that creates accountability, sometimes that creates headaches and hardships, but it's done in a way that continues to advance the conference. That scrutiny should exist and will always exist. And part of the job is to make sure you've got, kind of, a healthy mental outlook from which you can manage those pressures and whatever commentary may accompany those pressures.

Do you listen to Sports Talk Radio, do you read ever a message board? What is your media consumption habit to, kind of, keep a pulse on what your fan base, meaning, you know, the larger SEC region might be thinking, not necessarily about you but about the conference at all? How do you stay attuned? You know, they talked about how, you know, when you become a president, you're in the White House bubble and it's really hard to figure out what the real world is like. How do you maintain your connection to the "real world" that is your constituency?

There, I think I've been pretty active and I'm certainly not hiding from anyone, whether it's going to games, you know, you're going to do that in your own bubble, but I'll walk through a crowd and say hello. So, I mean, that's a low-level connection where, you know, it's... one of the adjustments is to walk down a street or walk through an airport, much people's head turn if as walk past because I spent, you know, 50 years plus of my life where nobody knowing who I was except a friend I might see in the airport. And now, I'll regularly have conversations while traveling. So, that's, kind of, a low-level piece. I'm [inaudible 1:50:39] of every day so I start pretty early. And my media consumption is from three or four different clippings services around higher education in college sports to see what's happening. And I do listen to Sports Radio to a certain extent, depending where I'm traveling to. I'll listen to the ESPN New Radio if there's a show on called Outkick the Coverage from time to time I travel to, but you're going to cover different thing, so you know, I'm going to consume some national stuff.

And then, you have to put that aside too. So, I think there's this delicate balance between understanding what's on people's minds and, you know, Herb Vincent [ph 1:51:21] our communications area and his staff will keep me informed of things. I'm the only one of the five commissioners who actually has an active Twitter account, so from time to time...

What's that like? Do you check your mentions?

Not on game days.

Yeah.

Just because it's... it's a...

It's a cesspool.

It's a strange universe. Yeah, I was going to say something a little bit more pleasant but...

Yeah.

You know, the language, the accusation is not anchored in reality. In fact, there was something I saw yesterday about, you know, "No penalty got called on this play and this is your bias," and I wanted to tweet back. Actually, there was a penalty called on the play and while the young man wasn't ejected, he was withheld from the next game. But if I enter that fray, you never get back out.

Yeah.

And so, I usually just look and see what's there and then move on pretty quickly because you know, the notion that somebody with 26 followers who's... but [inaudible 1:52:19], right? Who's got anonymous name and is calling you gutless, you know, if you're lacking courage, like, I had that this spring. It was around a baseball week, and I look and it's like, if you lack courage and you don't have any courage to do this or that, and I'm like, wait a second, you got 26 followers and your Twitter handle is a bunch of vowels, so I think that's like lacking courage that accuse people publicly that way.

Male Speaker 1: Be sure to catch live editions of Outkick the Coverage with Clay Travis weekdays at 6AM Eastern, 3AM Pacific.

Carla Marie: Are you following your passion? I'm Carla Marie, the host of Side Hustlers. I talk to people following their passion outside of their regular job. Everyone either has a side hustle, or wants to create a side hustle. Get inspired to start your own business or just hear the story and hustle of every side hustler. Get motivated with Side Hustlers. Listen and subscribe on the iHeartRadio app at Apple Podcast or wherever you listen to podcast.

Last couple of questions here and appreciate all the time. You've been listening to SEC Commissioner, Greg Sankey. This is the Wins & Losses Podcast. I'm Clay Travis.

You mentioned that the salaries that you made along the way, and for much of your career, you're making a decent living but it's not like you're making a living where you can really feel, like, hey, I might build some wealth here, right? That's changed for you in the last couple of years, how has that changed... and for people out there, and I think there's a lot of people listening who, you know, are grinding away at their job and they don't necessarily know if there is any possibility that they're ever going to make more

money. Is it better to make more money? Do you feel more comfortable now to be in a position, in chair where you're making a decent salary, or, and that might have been an aspiration of yours, have you found it to be overrated? I'm curious, you know, because you've been grinding away at your career for a long time, and there's a big jump between being the number two guy and being a conference commissioner that, frankly, I mean, it has got to be somewhat life changing.

Well, when I... when I made a lesser salary, I didn't have to read about it in the newspaper so often. But just a really strange experience that, again, there's not like a master's level program that prepares you for that reality. And you know, it's, Clay, you have to understand that as I walk through some of those job decisions, you know, there were savings spent, retirement accounts that went away, or debt accumulated within reason to... that were part of that... was part of that...

And then you got two daughters going to college, you've got a...

Yeah.

... you have a normal life, right? I mean, you're not making money that's outside of the realm of normalcy.

Yeah. When our eldest went to college, it wasn't like this huge college plan as part of these decisions and moves. And we're all going to make decisions and we're going... again, make the best decision we can based on as much information. But yeah, you get to a point where I made a healthy living and it transitions in a commissioner's role. But I will go back and say that I had... when I spent that night in the hospital, I then spent three or four years trying to figure out how is it that I'm going to live? And part of that is formed by faith, but a set of principles on how I wanted to conduct myself. And part of that is living within my means so that whether I got the job back in 2015 or didn't, I could function and I had flexibility to go take the next opportunity that would be right for me. And so you have this financial upside to come. You realize exactly what tax rates mean or they're talked about, because they were pretty abstract then.

And then there's another set of realities where it's not like there aren't pressures that come with that. I once sat with one of our head football coach's offices. This is 10 or 15 years ago, and I remember sitting there. I was there for an hour. It was a really engaging meeting but there is the biggest bottle of Maalox on his desk, behind him ... Behind his desk. And I remember thinking ... I don't remember what we talked about really, but I remember thinking, "Wow, he's got Maalox. I wonder what the pressure that [inaudible 1:56:34] stomach are on a day-to-day basis?" Because mine are, "Hey, if lose my job, can I pay my mortgage. How am I going to pay for college? What about when my kids get married? Do I have enough for retirement."

He's got none of that because of what he makes. And so, there's this whole other set of pressures that exist for that individual. Well, that's really, you know. The notion I kidded and said to someone, "The next time I'm asked about my salary, I say when you look at it like in total, on an annual basis of the law, but when you consider what is death threat, it's not that much."

And that's... You give your life for this job, and that is a very different existence than what I lived for 30 years. Nothing wrong with it, I was prepared ... as prepared as I could be, but that move from to the second chair to the lead chair, that gap is really how your life is then dictated by the role.

The last question.

In fact, I'll add, when Mike stepped down, somebody said, "What are you looking forward to?" And he said, "Not having my schedule dictated to me." Not for me but to me and that's part of the reality that probably informs the compensation.

What do you ... Last question for you. What do you do? You talked about being 32 and having that moment where you're working all the time, caffeine, four and five hours of sleep at night. What do you do now to try to get away and allow your mind to be somewhat clear because your decisions are a lot more consequential now than they were when you were 32 and suddenly had that moment where you're standing at the urinal and everything comes crashing down around you?

How do you manage that stress, that Maalox moment as you just put it with that coach now and get away and be able to clear mind and make good decisions that aren't just good for today or tomorrow, but it will look good in 5 to 10 years as the hope.

Yeah, well the cool thing is my blood pressure because I had to check yesterday. It was 115 over 68 which I think is a pretty good accomplishment after 4 years in this job.

Yes.

And the learning from that experience of the night in the hospital back in '97 was with two things. On a daily basis, I needed to have a rhythm. And this is where working with Mike Slive helped me immensely as he was a morning person and I was not an early morning person. And the only part of my day I control is early morning. So I get off and I exercise right away. And then I have about an hour for some time for myself and I usually go to a coffee shop, and I'll read, I might do some work, I might do some reading about faith and life, sometime a reflection, but that's an hour of my time. And that just puts me in such a healthy frame of mind even with the pressures around me. And that's usually from 6:30 or 7:30, and then I'm in the office, and then the day just goes, and then it will be 6:00, 6:30, 7:00 before I realize what day it is and what's, like, what time it is.

And so the first thing I've learned is I have to control that morning time and pretty disciplined about it whenever I'm home and keep that routine. And then I use some time in the ... You know our kids are grown. So it's Cathy and I, and, you know, to talk and try to have dinner at home, and some part of regular bookend.

But then every couple of months, I need to step away and I need to make that time. Now, it's impossible for me to do in the fall so I've had to adjust. So like the week before football season, I went in and be away from the office, I'll be on the phone talking, but it will give me these

moments to decompress, and think, and prepare for 14 really intense weeks of football season, and on the backend I do the same.

I will grab four or five days. We've had a rental house that we've used in upstate New York where we grew up. And so we'll go up there and actually for the next couple of weeks, around July 4th to do a lot, and I've had to be more intentional about just blocking time.

And my earlier comment about my schedule is dictated to me. There are things where I've said, "Okay, I'm going to get away for three or four days to just think through things." Not like a vacation where I'm riding roller coasters and things but, I mean, go away so I can think through issues in a different setting, and then it just evaporates because something comes up and I have to be here or there. So that is part of the challenge of the role but my earlier experience has helped me think through and try to prepare for that time, whether it's on a daily basis or on this every couple of months cycle where I step away for a day, try to think, get my mind right with ball as they say, and get into a planning and preparation process.

I know I said last question but this one is a 100% the last question. You're from New York. Does not having an SEC degree, which Mike Slive also didn't have, is that a pre-requisite now to be the commissioner of the SEC so people don't look at you and assume that you're going to be biased in one direction or another, or do you think that's just happenstance that both of you guys have kind of come from an area, in an arena where you didn't have a direct connection from birth to an SEC school?

We have 40 members of our staff and then 20 of them have SEC or maybe more degrees. And so I think I have every confidence that people can do jobs in a neutral way despite their degree.

However, I'll answer it with the first time I met Steve Spurrier. It's just he and I in a one on one situation. He didn't know me. He said, "Hey. Where did you go to college?" And I said, "Well, I got my undergraduate degree from the state university of New York, Cortland State and I have masters at Cherokee," and he says, "That's what we need. There's a bunch of people in their office that don't care who wins or who loses." So at least from the Steve Spurrier definition of there is an asset with not having an SEC university affiliation.

That's a perfect ending with a Steve Spurrier quote and a Steve Spurrier accent. Greg, thank you. You've hung out with us here for a long time. You can find Greg Sankey on Twitter @GregSanky.

Let him know what you think about this interview. He may or may not see it. Whatever you do, don't insult him or if you do, claim that you're Finebaum listener, not a Clay Travis listener. And I appreciate all of you for listening to Wins & Loses. Thanks again man. This has been outstanding. I think people are really going to enjoy it.

Thank you.

Again, Greg Sanky, @GregSanky on Twitter. This has been Wins & Losses with Clay Travis. Hope you enjoy this one. Hope you enjoyed Jason Whitlock, and hope you enjoy

Shannon Terry. We're going to have a lot of fun conversations. Go subscribe if you haven't already. I'm Clay Travis and this has been Wins & Losses.