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### An Interview With Rocky Rorabaugh

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**AN INTERVIEW WITH ROCKY RORABAUGH**

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**FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
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## CHAPTER II: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROCKY RORABAUGH

From the time he was a child, Rocky Rorabaugh knew he wanted a career in education. He wanted to positively influence young people's lives in the same manner he was influenced by his fifth grade basketball coach. Rocky's experience with all his coaches reinforced his desire to be a coach, and as a result, he spent thirty-nine years in education.

Upon graduating from Fort Hays State in 1946, Rocky was offered jobs in both Quinter and Downs, Kansas. Rocky accepted his first teaching and coaching job at Quinter High School in western Kansas, declining the job offer from Downs because he did not consider it to be an athletically successful town. To his surprise, Downs proceeded to win the football and basketball state championships that year.

Although Rocky enjoyed his teaching and coaching years at Quinter, his third year of employment was at Goff High School in northeast Kansas. Rocky was intrigued by Goff as this was just 15 miles from the town where his parents lived. Again, Rocky taught physical education but coached both boys'

and girls' basketball. Ironically, the first time Rocky watched a girls' basketball game, he was coaching it.

While at Goff, Rocky's reputation started to blossom as a developer of new programs and facilities. When Rocky arrived in Goff, a new gym was already under construction. He started a track and field program during his second year there, using a track cut from a milo field. Rocky thoroughly enjoyed his three years at Goff and considered these years at Goff to be some of the best in his life. Similarly, the community enjoyed him and the work he was doing as was evident by the canned foods, cream, pork chops and other assorted items that appeared on his porch.

Following his third year at Goff, Topeka Seaman High School recruited Rocky as a football, basketball and track coach. He saw this as an opportunity to advance to a bigger and more prestigious high school. While at Topeka, Rocky spent the summer months at the University of Wyoming working toward a degree in administration. Rocky chose the University of Wyoming because this was where Bill Bearly, his former track coach at Fort Hays State University, was

employed. Rocky finished his administration degree in 1952 and, deciding to use that degree, sent out numerous applications in the administrative field. Rocky received letters of interest from 23 of the 25 applications sent out and eventually narrowed the selection process down to the three high schools paying the highest salary. He interviewed with all three high schools and accepted the job at Morrill High School, again in northeast Kansas. It was here that Rocky served as superintendent, principal, and athletic director.

During his four years at Morrill, Rocky renovated the old high school building by adding a music room, science lab and an auto mechanics shop. Furthermore, to enhance the academic program, he implemented economics and sociology classes, believing that every student should be able to spend money wisely, communicate, and get along with other people.

In the summer of 1959, Rocky was contacted by Highland High School to become part of their administration, again serving as superintendent, principal, and athletic director. Rocky welcomed at the opportunity to move to a larger community and school system. In keeping with his educational

philosophy of a well-rounded student, Rocky again added sociology and economics to Highland's curriculum. While at Highland, Rocky continued to develop new programs and build new facilities. To lessen their dependence on the use of the community college's facilities, construction on a new gym began. Once the new gym was completed, the old gym was converted into counselor offices, lunch room, and modules for individual learning. Programs in cross country and baseball were implemented to increase student involvement in athletics and to further develop the athlete in general.

As a result of his success at Highland, the school system built a three-bedroom house, in which he lived rent-free. Rocky enjoyed Highland and could not believe life could get any better. But in December of 1967 Rocky was visiting family in WaKeeney, and he encountered the president of the Ellis school board. Rocky was invited to Ellis, a town neighboring WaKeeney, to interview for the vacant superintendent position of the Ellis school district. Rocky consented to an interview simply because it held the opportunity for his family to return to western Kansas. However, the Ellis offer was not

attractive enough to warrant a move, and Rocky declined the offer. As a result, during a Unified School Administrator's convention, a few of the Ellis board members asked Rocky to list what it would take for him to reconsider the job. Rocky sent a letter to the Ellis Board of Education, listing what he thought was an unrealistic counter offer of moving expenses, a three year contract, a school car and a competitive salary. Much to his surprise, they accepted his demands and asked him to sign the contract. Soon after Rocky signed the contract, the board asked him to start planning what would be his most challenging facility project, a new high school.

In 1977, the new Ellis High School, also known as "Rocky's House," was completed. Yet, this was not accomplished without encountering problems along the way. Rocky's first plan was to build a facility that combined the middle school with the high school and contained many extras that would enhance the athletic department. The plans called for a second gymnasium, wrestling and weight room, as well as other physical education facilities. The bond issue did not pass due to the extent of the "extras." The second plan was an

altered version of the first, with many of the school's finishing touches to be completed by the school's maintenance department. Rocky was happy when that bond issue failed because he did not ever believe that the work would be accomplished. After organizing a new and younger building committee, his third plan passed. Rocky believed the building of Ellis High School was his greatest accomplishment. In fact, he often got chills just walking into the facility.

As he had often done before, Rocky added economics and sociology classes to the Ellis curriculum, as well as cross country to the athletic program. It was during his tenure in Ellis that Rocky experienced the greatest accomplishment of his coaching career. Because he could not find anyone else to fill the cross country position, Rocky returned to coaching, taking over the position himself. Happily, Rocky led the team to an undefeated 1976 State Championship. This was truly an accomplishment of which Rocky was forever proud. In 1986, after serving a total of thirty-nine years in six different school districts, including eighteen as Ellis' superintendent, Rocky Rorabaugh retired from public education.



Throughout his career, Rocky Rorabaugh made many positive educational changes in the school system. Yet, there were many changes over which Rocky had no control. For instance, during World War II, fathers went to war, mothers went to work, and children were left home alone to look after themselves. Despite the war's end, the family structure did not return to its previous structure. Rocky believed this situation was a major contributor to the decline of respect, attitudes, and values shown among children and young adults. Consequently, teachers and coaches had to assume additional roles above and beyond what was earlier expected.

For this reason, Rocky still believed in the importance of the role which a coach played. He believed that coaches influenced students' lives by teaching values the student athlete did not get in a classroom situation. Rocky felt the lessons learned from athletic involvement were ones used by the student athlete to deal with everyday life occurrences. Nevertheless, during his educational career, Rocky watched as coaches were forced to change the ways in which they dealt with student athletes. While the student athlete continued to

develop into a more complex individual, deterioration of respect for self and others was evident.

On the other hand, one aspect of the athlete that did not change was the athlete's winning attitude and willingness to sacrifice. This was proven through the athlete's desire to become stronger and more skilled in his/her sport, due, in part, to better equipment and facilities. The use of a good weight training program replaced the "old-timers" version of conditioning through farm chores. While employed as athletic director, Rocky surveyed many high school and college coaches to determine the best method of developing strength in an athlete. His survey results supported the practice of weight training programs he had already implemented.

Along with weight training, Rocky discovered that safety was a major concern. When he first began his weight training programs, Rocky could graciously hand down old equipment to the younger children's programs. For safety reasons in later years, the right equipment had to be bought to replace the old equipment. This old equipment was then destroyed. Cutting corners was not an option. The safety of the students always

always came first. If cutting was done, lawsuits were imminent.

When Rocky began his educational career, lawsuits were infrequent, and parents backed everything he did. If children were in trouble at school, parents made sure that it wouldn't happen again by disciplining the children at home. Toward the end of his career, Rocky saw a drastic change in parents' actions. The parental responsibility of discipline was shifted to the school and lawsuits became more and more common. Parents were no longer supporting the school, but backing their children, no matter what the situation. Although it once was the role of the community to support school activities, Rocky also discovered that parents were too busy with other things, and school was no longer a top priority.

As the years went by, Rocky saw a shift in the state of athletics. Non-certified coaches, gender equity, and decreased funding of athletic programs were major issues school administration had to confront. As an increasingly large number of teachers withdrew from extra duty assignments, there was a growing need for qualified coaches. Rocky felt it

was important to have the best qualified person, regardless of his/her profession, leading the student athlete. In the early 1980's, the Kansas State High School Activities Association adopted Rule 10, a plan to allow non-certified personnel to be hired as coaches, which Rocky adamantly supported.

The issue of Title IX, the rule requiring program equality for both boys' and girls' athletics, was one about which Rocky had mixed feelings. He believed that girls benefited from athletic involvement just as much as boys did. However, new programs were not easily started due to the limitations set forth by Title IX.

Athletics were so important to Rocky that it was imperative that funding was continually available. When financial cuts needed to be made, he felt they should not be in athletics since they represented only one percent of the overall high school budget. The options of cutting programs or requiring athletes to pay a fee to participate were ones that disappointed Rocky.

Even though retired, Rocky remained involved in the educational process. He continued to be a fan of athletics,

attending as many area high school and Fort Hays State University games as possible. He also remained active as a starter for track and field meets across the state of Kansas, which included 15 straight State Track and Field Championship Meets.

Throughout his career, Rocky Rorabaugh always had a genuine concern for students. His contributions to the education profession were always designed for the betterment of the school and its programs. From his first teaching job to his retirement, Rocky continued to enrich the lives of others. Rocky Rorabaugh was a professional educator who had the formula for excellence.