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MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25701

ORAL HISTORY

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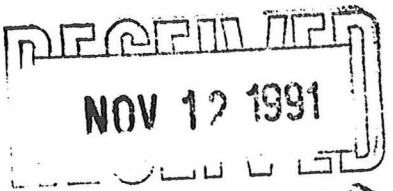
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Robert A Crabtree
(Signature - Interviewee)

518 13th ave
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Huntington WV 25701

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WEST VIRGINIA COMMUNITIES - Ceredo

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Robert Crabtree

CONDUCTED BY: Michael Lewis

DATE OF INTERVIEW: December 1, 1984

TRANSCRIBED & TYPED BY: Gina Kates

Mike: Oral history interview December 1, 1984 uh, Robert Crabtree, Vice-Principal, Ceredo-Renova High School, Mike Lewis. Uh, Mr. Crabtree, as a former player for Coach Carl Ward, uh, first question I have is a two-part question. What influence as Carl Ward had on you through your career as a player and now as an administrator in the same high school?

Robert: Well, I think the ...probably the main influence Coach Ward had uh, on my life was to institute a set of values that uh, number one told me that if you want to get somewhere in life, you've got to work at it, set your goals early enough in life and uh, work at it until you are able to follow through with it. Uh, the way that they did in football, of course, they won, we would set our goals on what we were gonna do for that year. Uh, we would go out and practice like we were gonna go to the championship, even though that was the day of the season. Everything that we did during practice was designed to improve us. And therefore uh, later on in life I used that and uh, I realized that we can't get any place unless that you really work at it. And I think that that's what I've been doing, is perfecting what I did in high school. And that's just uh, continuity. Just keep on working at what you're doing. If you have a setback, you can't let it get you down. And that's one thing that he always talked about, was the fact that, you know, there's gonna be days when things don't go right for you. Uh, you...you work hard on the football field but it just doesn't work for you. And so you've just gotta pick yourself up and go again. And the same way with uh, Coach Ward's former ball players. They're out in their regular jobs now and a lot of times things don't go right for 'em and but yet you don't quit. You just keep on pluggin' away until you get it right the next time.

Mike: Uh, in talking with the Coach, he stressed that he teaches fundamentals as a football, he teaches fundamentals and that he stresses the execution of those fundamentals. Uh, but besides fundamental, just basic football, what other techniques or innovations do you attribute that he's come up with here in the football program here at C-R, that's made him so successful?

Robert: Well, I'm not really sure if it's a technique or not, but I think he has a special knack of being able to recognize athletes and to recognize the skill of those athletes and place them in positions where they will mesh as a team. Uh, a lot of times you'll see schools where that you have one or two great athletes but yet the school does not win a lot of ballgames. Uh, at Ceredo-Renova High School uh, Coach Ward gets the most he can out of the boys uh, by recognizing their talents and putting it at the position that he needs at that time. It might be that uh, the boy that is the starting guard his junior year might be the running back uh, that scores the winning touchdown uh, in a championship game his senior year. Coach Ward is not bound by keeping one boy at a position for 4 years. He...he recognizes the...the talent that he needs for that year, and he puts the boy at that position. Uh, some of the other things that have happened in the past, that might indicate that Coach Ward has a little bit more uh, football

savvy than some of the coaches in the area, I believe he's a motivator un, Coach Ward has techniques to where that in my day, what he would do would be he would use the inspirational speeches in order to get his point across and I know things have changes a little bit and he of course, adapts to the different type of athlete to what we have today but during my era he would give un, I would say motivational speeches whenever he wanted to get his point across. And a lot of times it would have you almost to tears. Uh, or have you so excited that you wanted to go out and play right then. Uh, Coach Ward grew up under Coach Henderson, Cam Henderson at Marshall. He played his freshman ball there. He un, un, of course, Cam Henderson was a motivator that used a lot of inspirational type messages and stuff and I think the coach took some of the best qualities of Coach Henderson and applied un to the high school program when he became un, a high school football coach. Uh, he un, some of the other techniques, he films all of his games. He's one of the few coaches in the area that un, one of the first coaches, high school coaches that would film all their games and stuff and then break it down and go over the game films and actively go out and get two or three sets of films of his next opponent and break it down and walk through plays in the gym and work it over. He used a form of (inaudible)...memory where he would un, have the players go over the same plays, over and over again, until there was no doubt that what they were to do on each play. Uh, other innovations, un, I'm not really sure. I would say that un, un, he had a habit, when I was in school, of trying to un, keep the opposition guessing. I know in one particular instance un, he knew that there was a coach in the stands from St. Albans High School, which ranked 2nd or 3rd in the state at the time in triple A, and we were supposed to play 'em next week so un, he un, took a wide tackle six defense and installed it against Buffalo, which of course, we never run that type of defense. And so the scouts would see the wrong defense. And of course, when we went up the next week and played 'em, un, they were totally surprised. So, he...he un, he'll use anything he can to win. Any kind of un, special techniques, special play, we always would have one or two special plays that we'd put in, depending upon what team we played against and what he saw in films that he was critiquing. Sac un, un, he ...he...I think he followed in the footsteps of Coach Henderson and probably in many respects un, un, Vince Lombardi un, of the Green Bay Packers, because he...they have a lot of similarities and stuff.

Mike: Uh...the Coach has said, Coach Ward has said that un, un, one of his un, one of the men that's had a lot of influence on his ...both his life and his career as a coach un, has been his assistant. The coach here at Ceredo-Renova is Coach Dale Craycraft. Uh, what dimension do you think that un Coach Craycraft adds to the program here?

Robert: Well, both...both coaches are highly intelligent un, motivated men. Both are bachelors that have grown up in the community and have never left so their roots are deep in Ceredo-Renova. I think that un, they act as sounding boards for each other. Uh, any time you have someone that's highly creative,

dedication in education. So I think that Coach Ward is...has been a very positive influence.

Mike: So uh, you think uh, the tradition of following a winner is one of the reasons why we have such a and I'm saying we because I'm a member of the community, why we have such a large turnout and a large following uh, would you have anything to add to that now that you're as you say you're in an administrative position in the school. Why is there such a phenomenal turnout year-in, year-out, both for home and away games? Because at some...on some instances there will be as many or more Ceredo-Kenova fans at an away game as the home fans.

Robert: I think it boils down to the fact that the majority of the people uh, in the town for the past 20 years have gone through the program, they've been in the band, they've...cheerleaders, majorettes, band members uh, or football players and uh, they...they live in the community and as they uh, get to a point in life where they can follow the team, they do. It's almost like a 20 year soap opera. When you get hooked on it, you get hooked on a soap opera, you uh, you can't miss it. You feel obsessed to...to see the show and see what happens for the next week and so on and so forth. And I think football at Ceredo-Kenova High School has become an obsession of sorts, where the people truly want to see it, enjoy it uh, they don't mind driving two or three hours to watch a game. They're going to support the kids. If the kids lose, they'll still be back next week. Now, you might lose a few fair weather friends but the majority of these people will be back week after week, even if they lost. And I think that's because that uh, it's like I say, it's ...it's something that they have dedicated themselves to do. It's like at Vinson High School, the people support the band. And they've dedicated themselves to going out and support the band, to raise money for it. At Ceredo-Kenova High School uh, I coached soccer last year and at 10:00 at night after soccer games I'd look around and there'd be 8 or 9 or 10 men out there getting ready to water the football field. And uh, get ready for the game the next day. Uh, it's not unusual to have that type of support. And I think it's just a very positive thing that goes on in the community.

Mike: Coach Ward has been a...a football coach here at Ceredo-Kenova for uh, the past 35 years. And his record in terms of win loss percentages is phenomenal. But a lot of ...of people from surrounding communities that don't know the concept of the whole program here uh, think in terms of Coach Ward as putting a lot of emphasis on winning football. Some people think that uh, the program here is geared entirely to win football games. Uh, could you reflect on that?

Robert: Well, basically the program at Ceredo-Kenova High School involves the physical education department and uh, before the school became uh, 9 through 12 uh, it was, used to be 7 through 12 and anyone that was in an athletic program, took a gym class. So they got a lot of good conditioning, a lot of weight lifting, a lot of running, and they were very well prepared when they went

out for sports. Coach Ward is also the head basketball coach and last year uh, his team uh, set the state record for the most wins in a row. I think they had 21 straight wins or 20 straight wins. So uh, he's not just pushing football as such. He's pushing athletics. He believes that if you're not gonna play football, you should play soccer or play some sport, run cross-country or whatever, that athletics is the true measure of the man. That going out and competing against the elements, against yourself, against pain uh, against disappointment uh, all these things and being able to bounce back, time after time uh, is really what life's all about. Life just like you say is not uh, one bowl of cherries or whatever. That you actually have to ...to meet your adversity head on. And this is what we do on a football field.

This is what you do on a basketball court, or when you're running cross-country and Coach Ward tries to...to uh, teach that or get that point across to the kids. He's been very, very successful in the fact that he tells them that if you are gonna uh, meet adversity head on, shouldn't you be prepared, shouldn't you be the best conditioned person you can, shouldn't you have your mind mentally prepared that you know what to do and when to do it uh. He used applied psychology. He uses anything he can to get this point across to the kids. And then when you are in good shape, as strong as you can be, and mentally and physically prepared for the game, if you then lose, then you've nothing to be ashamed of. So to win at any cost angle is really not there. He just wants you to...to do as well as you can. If you win, fine; if you lose and gave it your best shot, then uh, he still will be proud of you. And Coach Ward has indicated many times the team, one of the teams that he's most proud of was his first team, that only won one ballgame, in 1969. So I think that maybe uh, uh, has been uh, misalligned there a little bit. I think or whatever it is, I think that he, that's a misconception, that to win at any cost. It's just that he's very successful with what he does. Not that he's trying to produce a state championships every year; he's trying to produce the type of athletes that normally win state championships.

END OF INTERVIEW