

Wendy Gumbert

USA Quad rugby Paralympic coach

Former vice President of the United States Quad Rugby Association

Former Camp Director at Roosevelt Sports Training Facility

Interview conducted by

Andrew Ondich

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Disability Studies Minor

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Biography

Wendy Gumbert is a USA Paralympic coach and has been with the USA Paralympics in some fashion since 1993. She was the wheelchair sports coordinator at Warm Springs Hospital in San Antonio, Texas when she found her passion for quad rugby. She then moved to Atlanta where she had more success as a coach at the Shepherds Center. After which she helped make the Roosevelt Sports Training Facility one of the premier adaptive sports training facilities in the U.S. In the year 2000 she was the assistant coach on the Gold Medal winning USA quad rugby team. She now works to help bring accessibility to adaptive sports in Texas.

Topics Discussed

- Warm Springs Wheelchair Sports
- 1993 Olympic Festival
- Shepherds Center
- Paralympics pay to play
- Roosevelt Training Facility

- USQRA Vice Presidency
 - 2000 USA Quad rugby gold medal
 - Differences in Olympic venues
 - Differences in Actability in different counties
 - Early life and initial interest in disability
 - UIL
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Ondich

This is Andrew Ondich interviewing Ms. Wendy Gumbert for UTA Arlington Disability Oral History Project. Today's date is March 26th and I am at home, we are doing this interview over the phone, um, today we will be talking with Ms. Gumbert about her life, adaptive physical education U.S.A. Quad Rugby and the 2000 Paralympics. Thank you so much for doing this with us today Ms. Gumbert.

Gumbert

You're welcome.

Ondich

Alright, so can you just give me a quick background about you and how you got into everything?

Gumbert

Um I went to school for adaptive physical education and through my volunteer work in that um years of studies I discovered Paralympic sport, or wheelchair sports at that time and found a passion that I had for that and that is when I learned, recreation therapy was the route to go to do that as a job in those days so I went a second degree and got a degree in recreation therapy. So, I ultimately have two bachelor's degrees. One for adaptive physical education and one for recreation therapy, um my first job was to develop a wheelchair sports program in San Antonio Texas it was called Warm Springs Wheel Chair Sports I started with four rugby players playing wheelchair rugby in a parking lot, in my interview process they asked me if I was... if I knew anything about wheelchair rugby and I said as a good interviewee had been taught, OH YES, I have been to a clinic on it. I had been to a one-hour introductory clinic on wheel chair rugby I did know what the sport was and that was it, I knew very little about it. They said oh great cause you're going to be the coach and I again answered, perfect no problem (laughing) and I was given this team of four athletes playing in the parking lot and learned the sport along with the athletes uh there was one veteran athlete that um that assisted and really kinda played that mentorship roll to teach me he had been playing for years and years and years so he taught me the sport, the sport was very much like basketball I was a collegiate basketball player and also had done some coaching in basketball so, traditional basketball so the carryover was very similar. My athletes in the beginning will tell you stories of as I was learning and learning drills I would say ok this is a new one so bear with me while we get the adaptations right cause I would take basketball drills and I would just alter them the best I could to work in the situation... for the sport of rugby and for the chairs and the

abilities you know that these athletes had and so sometimes it would be a little trial and error and they would always laugh cause you know I had to change things up a little bit but I always figured it out and the we came up and that became our regular drill and they knew how it worked and whatnot you just had to add the adaptation of it. um through that program at warm springs wheelchair sports um I started with that one four athletes in a parking lot when I left that program five years later we served about 350 athletes in 19 different sports, and uh wheelchair rugby was one of our stronger sports uh took that team to national championships on three occasions I believe, and um

Ondich

And that's gonna be the uh Atlanta Rolling Thunder that you're talking about?

Gumbert

No that is San Antonio Scorchers

Ondich

Right the San Antonio Scorchers ok I have that as well, um so when you uh after Warm Springs and the Scorchers um can you tell me a little bit about the 1993 Olympic Festival and what your roll as the coordinator for disabled sports was in that?

Gumbert

So in 1993 the Olympic Festival came to San Antonio and I was hired as the adaptive sports coordinator for the events that they had there where you know Paralympic you know sporting events so you know we, there was track and field was part of it and uh swimming... I'm trying to think what the other sports where and we, it was an able-bodied traditional Olympic festival and we mainstreamed these sports within their demonstrations within in the traditional Olympic festival and those where really grand events that where done in the united states as a entry level for athletes to get some really good high level experience before they try, went to trials that kinda thing before the Olympic Games it was a huge movement to create more opportunities to foster Olympic athletes in the United States they no longer have those events now but the where really a neat cycle of events when they would happen so bringing Paralympic sport into those was a great eye opener and a great awareness for our sports and our athletes to be on that kinda stage.

Ondich

Right. um so was this considered one of the break through movements in the Paralympics at this point in time or had Paralympics been going on for a while and just started to and you were just brought on at this point.

Gumbert

(ringing noise) Paralympics had been going on for a while of course they ya know the first Paralympics that where parallel to the Olympics was in 1988 in Soul Korea and they had been for years before that but that was the first time in 1988 that we were really seen as more equal to the Olympics, so that was the big breakthrough in the movement of the Paralympics in 88, and so this was in 93 and it was a breakthrough in the United States for us to be joined with such a high level of traditional sporting event so it was a key part of the Paralympic movement in that time yes.

Ondich

Right, awesome. So later on, you uh you did move to Atlanta and started a US Quad Rugby team called the Rolling Thunder, or did you just join on as the coach?

Gumbert

So I accepted a job in 1996 when the Paralympic games where in Atlanta uh Shepherd center was a key part in bring the Paralympics to Atlanta or providing support they were one of the premier Paralympic sports programs in the United States at that time and um, they had a position open. I accepted that position and under that position there was a wheelchair rugby team there was also a track team and so I coached that wheelchair rugby team so they were already and established Rolling Thunder was already an established team, and then I just became the coach once I accepted the job me coordinating the whole program not just the rugby team the entire program but since rugby was my passion I went ahead and coached the team as my side gig that team we took to the national championships on two different occasions...

Ondich

Almost, immediately right?

Gumbert

Um maybe the second year not that first year. Did not go that first year maybe the next year yes. And that when I started, in 96 I got invited as an assistant to the program for USA rugby I wasn't on the coaching staff but I still got invited as uh kinda apprentice coach and so they gave me a couple of other alternate international trips to do a lot of those were clinics so we went all throughout New Zealand and Australia teaching wheelchair rugby and then I was at the training camps and the tryouts and whatnot for the USA team that year to go to 96 Paralympic games which was the first time wheelchair rugby was ever a part of the Paralympic games and that was we were a demonstration sport in 96 so in that then after 96 in 97 I was selected to um be a part of a then international team that traveled to Australia that year in 97 and then 98 I got selected as the assistant coach for our world championships and then hence in 2000 I was selected as assistant coach for the 2000 Paralympic team.

Ondich

And could you tell there was drastic change in adaptive sports from the beginning up until this point? Like had they begun to catch on more and more throughout your time from the beginning?

Gumbert

Yes so like in 96 it was a complete um pay to play you know for the USA team if I remember right I think they even had to pay for their uniforms now I don't recall exactly but it was they had to pay to get themselves to Atlanta ya know to compete in the Paralympic games they had to pay for everything and everything that I did with ya know any kind of international trip I paid for, as a coach people oh that's so great your coaching USA rugby you're doing this and that so awesome and what people didn't understand is yes it was great and it was a honor that I was doing it, but I was paying for it, it wasn't like I was getting paid. I was paying to go on those trips I was paying thousands of dollars so what my parents would do, I didn't make a lot of money it was kinda silly for me to pay thousands of dollars to on these trips to go work. It wasn't like I was vacationing and my um they had a trust fund set up that you could donate for travel if it had pertained to adaptive sports and so that was mostly for athletes but my parents and you know it was all tax free and it was contribution and so my parents instead of giving me Christmas presents they would just donate money into that account so that I could do these things I mean I really couldn't afford it so I mean well we're gonna give you money anyway or give you something if this is what you want and I was like yes this is what I want so they would just donate the money into there which usually wouldn't cover all of it but(laughing) it was definitely helpful so that's kinda how I did it in the beginning days and then 2000 was the first year that we were fully subsidized and so that was a huge breakthrough and it wasn't all the sports at that time but rugby was one of the chosen sports because we were such a contender to be the gold medalists. And so, U.S. Paralympics put us under so we they had found some grant or something for us and we were fully funded. Our camps were fully funded our coaches were payed, very little, but we were payed I wouldn't go, you still had your regular job, um so it was the first time that it was done that way, yes.

Ondich

Can you tell me about or a little bit about the Roosevelt Training Facility, and um the competitions, and camps that you guys use to have?

Gumbert

Yes. So from the Shepherds center that would um and I was in that area and I um learned about the Roosevelt center it was one of those ya know build it they will come type of facilities and so the facility down there in Warm Springs Georgia which is a town of two gas stations and a bunch of antique stores and like three restaurants. Not even a grocery store, there was a barber the athletes loved the barber there and that was it. That all that was in this town it was literally about two blocks long but the Roosevelt Institute which is president Roosevelts rehabilitation hospital and its built in this very beautiful park-esque um ya know area right next to the little white house and so what they did when the 96 Paralympic games came that entity the Roosevelt Institute got very excited about the athletes coming and they decided they would build a facility and host the athletes down there prior to the Paralympic

games so they built this facility they built this lake with these cabins surrounding the lake and it was gorgeous it had basketball it had a swimming pool it had a weight room it had a track it had tennis courts it was unbelievable and then it had housing for like fifty some-odd people in these cabins around this lake. They built it and they came the Netherlands team came down there and lived for two weeks or whatever prior to the 96 Paralympic games and trained down there and it was a very positive experience for the whole community, and of course for the patients of the rehab hospital itself, and then nothing happened. And it sat dormant, and um I was working at the Shepherds Center and then it was a year later and I didn't really understand all that yet and then I heard about it and I went down there to see this facility and I walked in and I of course I walked in and I the guy that ran the facility I knew him and I was like oh I know you and we ya know hugged and we knew each other and then he said well I need a camp director. And I said oh well tell me about this and I was really intrigued with the whole facility because here it was this gorgeous athletic facility that had not been used except for one, they had hosted in one year they had hosted one basketball clinic there, and that was it that was all that had been done with that facility since the Netherlands team ya know packed up and went to the Atlanta Paralympic games. So I came in and I took the job, he convinced me and I took the job, I'm also a small town girl so I wasn't jiving well in Atlanta the big'ol city I'm from a little bitty, this is a Texas university, Texas Arlington ya know everybody knows Wimberley so I ya know that's where I'm from so I wasn't jiving well in the big city so I thought oh this is a small town, oh my god it's a small town (laughing) so I um I decided to take the job and I from that position we started the Roosevelt cups which was, we hosted four or five different countries each time in a point system type competition. With multiple sports ya know it's a multisport competition and that was, it was all international competition plus the um well of course the USA team so those were amazing then I started what was called the world basketball challenge, and I did the world rugby challenge and it became and I was a we also assisted in lots of track meets so of course we hosted the dixie games we hosted track but in the Roosevelt cup had track, and the we would host the national championship through U.S. Paralympics down there one year we hosted all kinds of camps and clinics and so we had ya know the archery team from the Netherlands we would have the Canadian track team came every year to train down there, of course the USA teams came in and trained down there ya know they all did. We had the basketball team, we had the rugby team, we had the track team. They were all coming through training we even had some tennis come through. Japan would come it was so neat and kind of made this little moto the road to Sydney leads through Warm Springs. We had so many athletes that came through it was a really neat experience being a part of that ya know for that three years leading up to Sydney Paralympic games.

Ondich

So how does the word spread about a facility like this? Was there advertisement or just kind of reputation kinda got it going?

Gumbert

It was reputation, it was reputation and you know the Paralympic sport world those days was definitely much smaller. And you knew everyone ya know so everybody knew who I was and what I did and ya just made one phone call and you could get the contact for whoever you needed and it's still somewhat that way but it's a little harder now um the harder component is the military component thrown in there because those are positions that change monthly (laughing) they at least change every six months if not so you can't keep up with who's in charge of what in those so it's harder the community around Paralympic sport is still the same it's so easy to find that contact and find who is doing what where. So but now days fifty percent of it is all military, you have the military and then you have the community,

and that's the harder component know. Back in those days you didn't have that and everybody knew everybody and everybody, ya know you just saw one person and they could help you with who you were trying to find or the contact that you needed so that was easier back then and everybody knew what was going on, and we didn't have social media but everybody knew, you knew you talked to our friends and they would say aw man you gotta go down to this place this place is awesome ya know they treat you so nicely and we had a cafeteria right there and made their food, we had grills we'd do cookouts for 'em and on there of time there was the lake and the could go for nice walks and the could go for a kayak or whatever it was beautiful and it was serene and so they loved it, it was what they were looking for. It was something out of the city, they didn't have, there wasn't anywhere for them to go to get in trouble I mean they could kinda get, they could walk into town and there was a convenient store and the could get a beverage there, what the coaches are trying to do was take that all away so there was so little opportunity for it but they were really taking it all away, now if you had a diehard they could get to the covenant store and they could have themselves a beer or whatever but it didn't happen very often because the coaches really did a good job but this place was so serene and so out with nothing around there was nowhere to go.

Ondich

So, um after this can you tell me a little bit about your association at the USQRA I have here that at one point you were the vice president

Gumbert

Yes, I was, I was the vice president I believe I served... I know I served one term I might have served two and can't remember the terms were four years long and in that so biggest thing to write home about or whatever that I did within the USQRA was I developed a clinic system. So I developed how to, or kinda we had a whole clinic box so I had this big tub that I shipped from clinic to clinic that was filled with all the, what you needed for a clinic and then we had chairs that we were shipping from clinic to clinic. But it had the straps and the balls and the tap and the cones and the, everything you needed to run that clinic so if it was going to a whole new rural place that had never had wheelchair rugby you know and they had no idea what to do we would bring in the instructors they just had to recruit the athletes in the area and we had all the equipment to do it and so it made it, cause I didn't go to every one of those I was setting them up and so I just set up that kinda format of how they would work and I had a format of a schedule ya know how and so all the athletes that we would get could go in and be couches that aren't normally coaches and aren't normally very organized they would arrive and there would be this box and they would open the box up and it would have everything they needed. It had on the the top it had a sheet that had the schedule for them for the weekend on what they were going to be doing in the clinic and um, so it worked great and I mean I think, I haven't been involved in USQRA in years but I believe that the system is really somewhat the same.

Within USA rugby which I guess this is when I was vice president to I developed what we called the high performance program for USA rugby and it really wasn't just me it was the ideas, ya know we'd sit around and we'd talk and you get these ideas form athletes that they would say wouldn't it be great if we could do this, what if we did this, what if we did this, and I just sat there and I would just listen and listen and listen and so it wasn't really that it was my brain was coming up with all these things its that I put it on paper, and I said ok here is a high performance plan with all the ideas that the athletes would talk about and what things that they thought would work and here's the high performance plan and I put it on paper and we put it, instituted it from the , the first year was from the quadrennium for 2001 to 2004 and I became the high performance manager so I didn't coach that year I was over the coaches in a since and over the whole high performance program because we did more of a program not just situated on those selective twelve athletes only. Really carried other athletes longer really tried to

develop a deeper pool of athletes which was really the whole premise and idea behind it. Well in today's USA rugby as you kinda look at , ya know I read their articles of coarse cause my cousins the coach now I read their articles I read their stuff and they use the same system, so that system today is still in place. I mean with some tweaking I'm sure, but it's still the same high performance system and yes I hate to say I developed it cause I don't think that's the credit I need but I was the administrator of making it, putting it on paper and making it happen.

Ondich

Well that's pretty impressive, I mean. Uh can you tell me a little bit about the gold medal in the international wheelchair rugby federation?

Gumbert

Do you mean 2000?

Ondich

Yes, yes

Gumbert

I'm sorry, you mean at the Paralympic games?

Ondich

Right yes, yes, I'm sorry I had my notes mixed up.

Gumbert

Ok no worries, uh it was phenomenal so that was the first time that wheelchair rugby had ever been a full medal sport, in the Paralympics so in 96 we were a demonstration sport so this was the first time and we were in Australia and if you know anything about traditional rugby Australia and New Zealand are huge ya know fans of rugby. And so wheelchair rugby hit it off in those countries, and Australia being the host had a very strong team that year and they even had one of our coaches who had been a former USA coach which we were all friends still there was still ya know that rivalry here they had our 96 coach coaching for them and then uh I was new and Reggie Richner who was the head coach he had been an assistant under the other USA coach so there was a lot of rivalry to it and just the fan fair of rugby in general. They were gracious outside of the facility but within the competition it was wild and crazy and

they just wanted good rugby they even, um I actually do remember there was point in the game when the Australian coach Terry Vinyard put on like a stall an so it really slowed the game down it was before we had the shot clock and so you could really do that back then, which hence why we changed that rule now. And it was boring for the audience, because there was no more slamming and ya know the contact of rugby and what makes it so fun to watch. And their fans started yelling boring. It was the Australian team that was doing the stall not us (laughing) so it was very informal I was like wow they just want a good high level action of rugby but when you walked in I mean we did all our playoff games of course and we make it to the championship game and when you walk in that stadium it is amazing to walk in and see 20,000 fans at our sport a Paralympic sport you don't have that in the United States and so when we walked in and the guys rolling in it was a little surreal I was just like wow, it hadn't been sold out every game but it was sold out that night and that place was packed and they were screaming and yelling and they just loved it the fans were so into it, and uh it mad it for a really fun game super exciting game oh my god. We were down for ya know I can't remember the specifics of the game now you would think I would, I don't remember but I know we were down and then we came back and um I just remember at one time Reggie our head coach lookin at me cause we had these lineups we had practiced these lineups so that all twelve of our athletes had a line up so they all had a time to get into the game and we had really kinda tried to make'em even and we'd been using those the entire time and that's what we had practiced but he looked at me and we were down and he said what do we do. And I said you put in the four best players we got, and he goes but that's not a lineup, and I said I don't care you put in the four best players and we did it and we had some athletes that where mad because that was there line up and they didn't get to go in. I was the one doing the lineup because Reggie was watchin the court and I'd go down and I remember them lookin at me like what are we doing and I was like I don't care you guys listen to me this is what we are gunna do and we put on the four best players and it happened we won the game.

Ondich

That's incredible, can you tell me a little about the 2000 Olympics like how many teams where in the rugby competition to start with?

Gumbert

There was eight.

Ondich

There was eight teams. And was it done in kinda a round robin or was it an elimination?

Gumbert

Yes, two I believe (inaudible) two pools of four for the round robin and then you did the crossovers

Ondich

And um, to your recollection do you remember any of the other sports in that games, in those games, had you been to the Paralympics, obviously you'd been before the 2000 was there anything different about that year than years before that you can remember?

Gumbert

Yes um so I did get to experience a lot in 96 I was at the rugby venue as a support staff I should say. I was video tapping so that was my job, and I was like whatever I was there (laughing) I'm part of the team. And then I did experience and go to other sports you know in Atlanta at those Atlantic games but I wasn't in the village or anything like that so this experience for me in 2000 was different because I was in the village I was fully apart of a team and um you know going to the practice venues and all those different things I didn't do as much in Atlanta I was really just extra support staff at the games at the actual games so I didn't do any of the competitions and I wasn't in the village but in Atlanta as compared to Sydney when the biggest difference for me was that the main compound of athletic venues and they've done that in most Paralympic events since then it was amazing it was so great if you were in that compound and we were in that compound in Sydney and so with that athletic, ya know they had the athletic stadium the track and field and then I believe the pool was there and the rugby and then it had some of the auxiliary sports basketball was there and so everybody was within one area and that's the way they had that in a little bit in Athens, but rugby wasn't a part of that compound were where separated in Athens and that was a huge deal in that we didn't get as good of crowds in Athens and it didn't have as good of crowds overall but I think that it hurt us for rugby because we weren't in that compound where basketball was right there next door to the track stadium and so and those compounds are usually built around the course that the track and field stadium and so we weren't in it in Athens and then we came to Beijing and we were back in it and so rugby was right there you know in that compound so um that was a really neat experience because we could ya know I actually had a bike and I would bike over from the village I wouldn't ride the bus I would just bike over because then I had the freedom at that point then to just jump on my bike and ride my bike to the other some of the other venues at that time, now my husband was competing in track and field or track and I would I literally would finish a practice and id know that his event went off at you know 11:15 and we would finish practice at 11:00 and I could jump on my bike and be at that track stadium within like five minutes a five minute bike ride across the quadrennium I had my little volunteer that knew me cause I was doing it almost every day ya know at different times and I just I'd look at him and he goes got it, and he'd take my bike and I'd run in and I literally wouldn't even sit down I'd just run in and there was still programs at the time and I could run in if it was 11:15 I could get there at 11:14 and sure enough there they were, and I'd watch the race and then I'd leave. And go back the guys sometimes, I actually did it one day in the middle of practice cause I looked at Reggie and it was like a final and I said are you ok if I leave for ten minutes and he looked at me and he goes yes and I did I ran over there and watched it and came back and the guys I don't even think they noticed I was gone. It was fabulous.

Whereas there in Atlanta I um I guess it was one morning but in Atlanta I had transportation service and so it was great I could get from rugby, but it wasn't... I didn't make all his events because it was an hour drive even with the transportation service ya know the USOC or US Paralympic service I couldn't, it took me an hour to get to the track venue. Um but one morning I was trying to get to the track venue for his final for the 1500 and the traffic was so bad and it was so far and I ya know anyway I got there and I think I gave myself like an hour and a half to get there but it took longer anyway I walked into the stadium and we were walkin in and he was wheeling around the track and I was like oh there just a little behind and I ran in and everything a guy was yelling at me and I had a VIP pass and just flashed it and I'm like I promise and he walked in there later and found me and I was like I have it dude just leave me

alone cause I was so focused and anyway I was like oh I made it I made it I made it and I was sittin there and I'm watching and like wait a minute. He was taking his um victory lap and he had won. So, I went down to the media area and I was ok I'm just gunna pretend like I saw it, and I couldn't do it. He came out he was so excited, and I went to hug, and he was like oh and he starts talking about it and I went... I didn't see it.(laughing) But I saw the victory lap but that was huge the difference when you're so separated like that for me it was just rugby and track that I was mostly at but I was trying to get back and forth for thoughts but Atlanta or uh Sydney still to this day so I've been, I've been to all of them since Atlanta all the way through Rio and uh to the day I still think that um Sydney to me is still the best games. London was fabulous and it was it was but I still there was something about Atlanta for me and yes sure it's a team sport its different the people there and the way they had it set up the closeness of that village to that compound and there was so many things about that games that made it so much to me every year they say o this ones better this ones better this ones better, except for Athens, Athens was a little bit below par yet they pulled it off ya know they still had a Paralympic games and it was still fabulous. Ya know theres still great memories from that to but it wasn't to the caliber that um ya know when were in Beijing or when we were in London ya no but then when we were in Beijing everybody was like this is better and I was like, it did have the village very close I could ride my bike on that one to, but um I still was like I don't know. And then London oh this ones better and I was ahh still doesn't beat Sydney for me. Sydney to me was still the best. But that's my personal because of the experience that I had there with it being set up so perfectly for what I was interested in, which was the track you know only a few events in the track and in rugby

Ondich

Can you tell me a little bit about what your experiences uh for like not only adaptive sports but just for disabilities culture in general from country to country? Because as you have said you have been to many and you can kind of see things um can you tell like the difference by what country you're in on you know disabilities rights and things of that nature?

Gumbert

Well yes, I mean the Australian to me Australia and Great Britain have some phenomenal programs in the recognition and media that their athletes get. And then not far behind is Canada. You know Canada has an excellent um program as well. And that's where the Unites States was lacking. Is the marketing and the media I mean I you know I understand that there was more coverage you know for and even this winter's games or what not. But it wasn't the same you know I can sit down every night during the Olympics and I could and I don't even watch TV but you know I had to have my son turn it on because I need to know how to turn it on I was like Ok it's the Olympic I want to watch and he would turn it on for me. And I'd watch and for the Paralympic games I would have to turn it on then wait to find it then I would go on my Facebook page where I posted it and I'd get it and I would try and figure out what channel it was on and you know but then the time wouldn't come on until eleven o'clock at night you know it wasn't it wasn't on prime time when you wanted to watch. When did you want to watch you know when are you free? You're free at six o'clock to ten o'clock and then you've got to go to bed. I mean this is the normal person and that's not when it was on. So, they can say that its better, but I guarantee you in Australia and Canada it was. and that's the difference of where we still are in the media and marketing of today in the united states you know and then Japan and China are just phenomenal programs. You don't hear as much about them I don't you know I am not as close and connected to them you because the whole huge language barrier. (Laughing) (inaudible) I have a lot of friends in

Australia and great Britain and athletes that I stay connected with and so then I get that information from them and I see what's happening for them as an athlete and so that is why I see more of it for those as where in Japan and China I have never befriended any of those athletes because I can't talk to them.

Ondich

Um what about just accessibility in general like um in the different countries was it easy to get around for everybody because I know that Rio was kind of known for being under developed when they were doing just the Olympic games. So, I didn't know if maybe did were there ever any barriers that maybe?

Gumbert

There are always barriers but yes you know Sydney is probably still the best and and Beijing with London right there those three still accessibility wise had really done a good job to go around all throughout the city and really make sure it was accessible. Um you know one thing I remember remembering about um Beijing you know when a big huge city you know like Beijing that there's bad areas of town I remembered we would be driving and I was like man you don't see any slums or you don't see any trash it's so clean. But they told me later that they had done a huge cleanup of the whole city. To get that persona that there wasn't any trash and there wasn't uh uh you know a hood you know there wasn't those kinds of parts of Beijing which there were but they had cleaned them up for the games and you didn't see em. And I did notice that I was like this is crazy where where are the old rusty cars that are all over and all of the trash and they had cleaned it up. But Rio and Athens were had a little bit of accessibility issues but it wasn't it wasn't anything bad but one thing you got to remember is that these are athletes. I mean if they can't jump a curb then they're probably not a very good athlete. And they can't adapt to our you know they always have somebody with them I mean there's places you know my husband can't get up something or whatever. But I mean you don't even notice it I mean I just put my arm out and he grabs onto it and pulls himself up you wouldn't even notice that there was a curb there. Because we do it within a whole step and I mean and that's a way it is for most of 'em. So of course, wheelchair rugby has more on an accessibility issue you know being quads and you know they aren't paras. They can't do as much you know but I never found it I mean we were taking 'em in Australia we took 'em on a wild little vacation. um and before because we were last and we did a little like an overnight thing you know we figured it out. I mean nothings ever accessible so the part of the fun was figuring it out I mean we'd laugh and joke about it and that's what you have to do as someone with five athletes that have been in Paralympics sports don't come up to an inaccessible place and you know when they know it's you know it's within a city and you know they don't come up to that curb and get mad. They you know joke laugh and figure out a way to get around it.

Ondich

So if you don't mind can I back up just a little bit here um Cause I know that you got your degrees in adaptive physical education and things like that how did you how did you get into that kind of thing like how did how did this come across your radar?

Gumbert

Um well as an athlete myself I went to school for college on a college basketball scholarship and I um when I was a kid my mother says we had a um kind of a we had three cabins we rented and we'd live on the water um like picturesque and so there was always people you know swimming in our swimming hole all the time or what not. She says you didn't play with everybody she goes but there was two different families that came and special needs kids and she goes you always played with them. I would bring them into my room and I played with 'em. I you know I kind of gravitated to them and we have a neighbor who had a special needs daughter and I would you know they kind of realized that I was interested and so I did some babysitting or whatnot you know caregiving for her you know in high school uh leading up to because I ya know they discovered this interest and kind of passion I had for working with people with special needs and most of these were ya know cognitive or developmental disabilities and so it was when I got into school that I narrowed it down and figured out really that that's not the realm I like I liked the adaptive sports and working with physical disabilities. But I just had a connection to the way I, I mean it was just something inside of me just said this is what I like to do so just immediately I knew it when I went to school I said I wanna do you know adaptive PE because I was thinking of you know PE and sport for kids with disabilities but when I learned about the adaptive sports and physical disabilities I realized wait a minute this is real sport this other is really unique and still gravitate to it but it's not real sport because there's a lot of babysitting a lot of repetition you know what not because of the disabilities that you are dealing with developmental and cognitive disabilities whereas adaptive sports for physical disabilities its sport. The difference is they have a prosthetic leg or a wheelchair instead or basketball shoes.

Ondich

Well that okay um do you wanna can we get into a little bit about the UIL um and your work with them through adaptive sports and trying to get kind of high school into the whole mix on this thing?

Gumbert

So, youth Paralympics came into um Texas and set up a meeting with the UIL um when was that we are in 2018 so this was 2012 maybe 2013 2014?

Ondich

Is it sometime after the dear colleague letter?

Gumbert

Yeah and so anyway they got this meeting with the UIL to discuss with them in regards to providing sport for within the UIL for athletes with physical disabilities and so when they got the meeting they immediately said Wendy can you go to this meeting with us? I was like oh yeah sure you know ok you can do anything the Paralympics staff asks you to do especially if they come to your state so I was like

ok. So I go to the meeting and I'm sitting there listening and I you know you've got to do this presentation and present and you know I'm getting starting to get excited about my oh this would so cool but you know I but the Paralympics instigated it I did not I just I was the one that was local to carry it out and so I had a lot of support from U.S. Paralympics in the beginning um but I was the one here to do that presentation so I did that presentation uh and I presented to the UIL and the legislative counsel you know on and I showed my passion I'm, I'm very passionate and I uh definitely you can see it you know as I get into my speaking and whatnot when I'm in front of a big audience and anyways I'm not saying that, that's what it was. But we got it and all of the sudden I do that presentation it was in October and I do the presentation and it was like two days later it comes out that it's been accepted. And I am like oh my gosh that means that all these kids are going to need chairs and that means that we have to provide the chairs and we've got and I'm started and my brain just started going we have to educate all these coaches and oh my gosh so I just I knew I've got to find the money and I found some money to buy the chairs I've got to create a way to educate these coaches and so a committee myself and um two colleagues in Dallas very valuable Darlene Hunter and Paul Johnson who are UTA very much connected UTA Arlington connected but they worked with me and we developed and Darlene is so good with all of her education stuff so we developed an education presentation that we all used and would take it into the school systems to educate the coaches. And I I found the money I luckily had some connections and found the money and we started buying chairs and we started getting the word out and we started that first year with about eleven athletes I think I wanna say and we now have close to sixty athletes that are competing it's been this is our fourth year.

Ondich

So, progress has been pretty steady and pretty good?

Gumbert

Yes

Ondich

Well that's great!

End of Interview