

Cezar Olivas

UT Arlington and Movin' Mavs alum, former member of Mexican National Wheelchair Basketball team

*Interview conducted by
Kevin McCrea
in 2016 in Arlington, Texas*

Disability Studies Minor
Special Collections and Archives
University of Texas at Arlington

Copyright © 2016 by University of Texas at Arlington Libraries

Biography

Cezar Olivas was born in Mexico circa 1975 and was an only child. He and his family moved to Oklahoma sometime later. The town in Oklahoma was so small that he knew most of the people in it. He graduated from high school in 1993 and decided to attend the University of Texas at Arlington. He became a member of the wheelchair basketball team coached by Jim Hayes and went on to win three National Championships by the time he graduated in 1999.

After graduation, Olivas was selected for the Mexican National team in wheelchair basketball and went to the Paralympics in Sydney, Australia in 2000. He was eligible for the Mexican National team because he was born in Mexico.

After his playing career he went to work for Per4Max Medical in Grand Prairie, a company that specializes in the design of wheelchairs for athletic competition.

Topics Discussed

- Biography
- Accessibility of school.
- Independent living/driving/personal care
- Changes in adaptive technology.
- Disabled community
- Interactions with other students and faculty.
- Who were their allies/advocates
- Adjusting to disabilities over time/if the disability was acquired

- Family attitude about disability
 - General attitudes towards people with disabilities
 - Competing in wheelchair basketball
-

McCrea

This is Kevin McCrea and I am interviewing Cezar Olivas for UT Arlington Texas Disability Oral History Project. Today's date is March 16, 2016 and I am at the University Center.

I am here today to talk to Cezar Olivas about living with disabilities. Thank you for participating.

Cezar Olivas

Of course.

McCrea

I guess tell me a little about yourself to start out.

Cezar Olivas

<topic>Biography</topic>

Okay, well my name is Cezar. My first name is Julio. You will find me in the school as Julio Olivas, but I've always gone by Cezar. Um, I'm from Oklahoma. What brought me here was the wheelchair basketball team. Got a full scholarship to come to school here, so it wasn't something I could turn down. I ended up studying Political Science and Spanish, ended up with double majors in both those areas. And, played wheelchair basketball obviously for UTA, and ended up playing international basketball as well. I was part of the Mexican National Team, since I was born in Mexico I was qualified to play for the Mexican National Team. I played with them for about five or six years. And um, then started working, making a living, and uh, started working for Per4max, with another alumni from the team, he owns it, is one of the owners. And anyway he hired me in 2007 and I've been working for Per4max since. It's kind of our background as far as sports, so I fit right in. And that is where I'm at now.

McCrea

So first of all were you born with the disability or was it acquired?

Olivas

<topic>Adjusting to disabilities over time/and was the disability acquired</topic>

No sir, I was a thirteen-year-old on a three-wheel motorcycle and broke my vertebrae T-12, complete injury. So, yeah I was thirteen, and, so I went through a few months of rehab in Amarillo, Texas. So yeah, it was an acquired injury, or disability, which took obviously...luckily I was young, you know very adaptive. So, um as opposed to someone maybe a little older in their thirties or forties it's probably a little harder to adapt to the new life as opposed to a teenager, so but yeah it was an acquired disability for sure.

McCrea

So I guess how has adaptive technology changed since the 90s?

Olivas

<topic>Changes in adaptive technology</topic>

Since the 90s. Um, you know I was very lucky that I got recruited to come here at least UTA because looking back one of the big pulling points although it wasn't a big decision for me to come here due to the full ride as opposed to some of the other universities that I was accepted at, uh you know the first things that I remember reading about UTA was how accessible it was. And it ranked in the 90% as far as accessible schools as far as campus wide, which was unheard of, you know in the early 90s. But I can tell you since then it have taken even further steps as far as how far we've come. Now I've been to the other universities since I've come here and they've definitely all caught up if not surpassed some of the facilities-wise and accessibility that UTA has, so it was definitely cool to see that UTA was already ahead of the game for sure. But as far as technology, you know and disabilities you know it's what we see day in and day out is ramps and automatic doors, those are the physical things that we see on a daily basis. I'm sure you can get real scientific with the technology and how far they have come since the mid-90s.

McCrea

Well, obviously since you played wheelchair basketball I'm assuming that the technology knowledge has changed over the years.

Olivas

<topic>Changes in adaptive technology</topic>

Yeah, absolutely, it's really just more the engineering. You know, the engineering even from 1997 to 2007 it was a huge leap in the wheelchair sports world. Just the time and energy and engineering that the chairs were getting the focus on definitely you could see it through time. Whereas, early 90s, mid-90s, we were still adapting our everyday chairs for sports. We would take an everyday built chair like mine right here (points to his wheelchair) and adapt it for sports, whether it increased the camber of the big wheels or made it a little bit more dynamic and what not. That was in the early to mid-90s. Then now a sports chair is what it is, you don't really adapt an everyday chair to sports, I mean you could, but it's not going to be as dynamic as a light weight.

McCrea

World-class.

Olivas

Exactly! So, now by far the wheelchair sports chairs have come definitely a long way. Where you can attribute that to technology and engineering, which is where my boss comes in, he's a mechanical engineer and he wanted to develop his own chair as opposed to messing with the everyday chairs transforming them into sports chairs. So, big part of it for sure. So technology yeah, we use top of the line aluminum, and we have the engineers to help us get there, also the welders, without that you don't have our world-class wheelchairs, for sure.

McCrea

So, what were your interactions like with your coaches? Was their much coaching?

Olivas

<topic>Interactions with other students and faculty</topic>

Yeah. Well my coach Jim Hayes, I'm sure you've heard the name. He recruited us and we, most of us that were a part of the program in the 90s and early 2000s, we can attribute everything that we have now to him, um, because he opened up that opportunity for us, and not just for the education, but also to play ball. Which is a sport we all love, but taking it further he was also a mentor, and we all grew to admire what he had done through his life, not just by being a coach and a recruiter, and running the disability program, but also just as a person, and the things he had accomplished. He had a disability that was acquired as well, so we could all kind of relate and see that, so for me he was a father figure that I didn't have as far as away from home and what not, so definitely a huge aspect for me. At least coming to school here, and growing up from a teenager to an adult for sure I always went back to him. He passed away in 08', but we always had conversations through the years after I graduated in '99, and so I had nine years to still come back and shoot the breeze with him, or come ask for advice, so, definitely a big part of coming here and being a grown up and being an adult. Big part of it.

McCrea

Could you go into how he I guess influenced you to go towards the national team?

Olivas

<topic>Interactions with other students and faculty</topic>

Um, it was a progressing thing; you know I was very raw when I came on the team. I hadn't played in the junior leagues at all, so I came here very raw, I rode the pine, like we like to say in basketball for a couple of years, I maybe played a minute or two in each game, because I was learning the game, but little by little, I paid my dues, and spent the time to get better, and being a part of the Mexican National Team was I think just the next step after UTA. I had come pretty far so, luckily it worked out the time and the effort that I put in you know, for sure.

McCrea

I saw that you competed in the, I guess the Paralympics.

Olivas

<topic>Competing in wheelchair basketball</topic>

Yep. In 2000, that was right after I graduated, so it was just part of that progression that kind of followed. I became a part of the Mexican National team in '99, and then the following year, we went to Sydney for the Paralympics. Which, you know in and of itself was pretty awesome just because, I believe we counted there was nine of us UTA wise that were there. From I think four or five different countries, so definitely. (Noise in the background)

So what I was saying it was very cool the Paralympics 2000 because I believe the count was nine of us that were there from UTA. Five different countries, so that was very cool, that kind of tells you the reach that UTA had. I think we represented a couple guys from Australia, Denmark, Mexico, the U.S. has some players, and there's another country, Canada. So, you could definitely see the reach, I think we have a photo of all of us that got together in the closing ceremonies at the Paralympics. We all took a picture it was pretty cool. All of us encompass all sorts of disabilities; from Polio to amputations, to paraplegia. So, yeah, it's funny what the program did for us here, it brought us all together and made us kind of

experience life together as a team, but also individually, you get to grow and experience stuff and life, so, it was very cool to see that. I got to tell Jim Hayes at the time I was real proud of that that we were all there representing UTA. I wish, I think the school did put an article out in the *Shorthorn* at the time, but I don't know I always felt there could have been a little something more. I don't know, maybe that is just me looking to get a little more recognition for the program, I don't know. But that was very cool. The Paralympics was definitely the upper echelon of our sport for sure. That is the target, the goal if you are playing in wheelchair ball. That is something you definitely want to achieve.

McCrea

So, how did you, how were your interactions with other students off the team?

Olivas

<topic>Interactions with other students and faculty</topic>

You know, probably real similar, like other students, I think the only difference, like other athletes as well, you have a little small window to give to campus, or, other programs, for myself, I was a part ARMAS which was an association of Mexican students; they are huge supporter of the team. I don't know how much I had to do with that, but definitely a huge supporter, so, I think when we could, we definitely would reach out to other programs, whether it was fraternities or sororities, now since there is a women's team. Jim always wanted us to reach out and be a part of campus life, not just for ourselves but also for the team, because if we became a part of a fraternity or an organization. (laughter) So, yeah, Jim always definitely wanted us to get out there not just for us but for the team for the support and just to get the recognition, because we always lacked that. We didn't have the support of anyone else but ourselves to get the name of the team out there and the things we accomplished. The school helped out a little bit, they gave us some banners and hung them up in Texas Hall, at the time, but the rest really was up to us, to kind of get other students involved with us, but as far as interaction with other students, I think it was just like any other student.

We tried to just make friends, whether it be for school, or class, because you don't always have a class with a teammate, so obviously you want to make friends and be a part of school. That was always the thing Jim always wanted to preach to us.

McCrea

Ok, so what about interactions with the faculty?

Olivas

<topic>Interactions with other students and faculty</topic>

Faculty? You know that, I got along great, I was a political science major, so at [that] time Dr. Saxe was still the professor, but I always tried to interact with my professors as much as any other student. The bad thing for me is that some classes, I wasn't able to sit up front, you know I had to sit up top, for accessible reasons or what not, so that kind of kept me away at times from some professors, but it didn't stop me from going to see them in their office, or asking after class stuff either, so. So, I would say I had a normal faculty relationship compared to any other student.

McCrea

So you were in here in the mid-90s I'm assuming '94-'99?

Olivas

'93 to '99

McCrea

Okay, so I assume then the Americans with Disabilities Act would of probably just been going into effect.

Olivas

<topic>Accessibility of school</topic>

Right, Right! Yeah, you know, I got to see that almost from the ground up, for sure. Whether it's going to a restaurant and not being able to get into a restroom, or ramps not being available. I got to see that progress for sure. Nowadays, someone who is newly in a wheelchair may not recognize things, because pretty much it's supposed to be 100% accessible, but back in the early '90s it was a challenge at times, because not everything was accessible, and the ADA was just kicking in.

So, yeah it was interesting at times, lack of ramps was a huge one. Whether it is getting into a building, or a store, or not being able to get into certain areas in a building. All those things were kind of obstacles I think we've all had to come across through the years. Even UTA, it was 90% accessible, but we probably all found that 10%, you know the bridges that cross over Cooper, just the two, the south end, and the north end, they're elevators they're not ramps like the central part. Even those elevators would break-down at times while we were on the bridge, so we had to go down a flight of stairs in our chairs, so it will find you; it's just part of it. (a door opens and closes)

McCrea

So, I guess independent living and personal care... how does that work?

Olivas

<topic>Independent living/personal care</topic>

I think the biggest thing as far as our program was we moved here and we got an apartment. That was part of being on the team sort of as opposed to moving into a dorm. So, there were some pros and cons to that. Living in a dorm, you get to interact with a lot more people on a daily basis. So you get to be more involved with other students from different areas, so, that would have been nice to have, but you know what I moved here to an apartment with a roommate who was a junior at the time. So it was just me and him as opposed of being apart from the team it was just me and him as roommates. You know, I didn't have a slew of people that lived in my building like a dorm. Luckily we matched up pretty good.

But, yeah coming from home where mom takes cares of all your little stuff. Of course it takes some adapting, but we're all pretty independent for some it's probably more trying than others. Some were more babied a little more than others. Teammates through time we got to see that. We probably got teased some and we teased at the same time, but I think its being part of the team. But you can tell who was being more babied at home, prior to coming here. So, it probably took them a little more time to get used to being independent. Being away from home, having to care for yourself, from eating and preparing food to living on your own. We didn't have many bills to take care of. If we wanted we could have a full slew of bills, but really I just had a phone bill, and an electric bill to take care of. Like any

other student, we had to learn to make do with what we had and being away from home. But, I'll tell you what, the facilities that the gym had for us were definitely very helpful.

Maybe, the dorms at the time weren't accessible. Maybe that's why it wasn't an option back then. I never went into a dorm to check them out. So, I didn't know what the accessibility was for the dorms. I know some were, but the majority I didn't know. Maybe, that was part of it. Maybe, that is why we all kind of got an apartment, with a roommate; that's the way I lived on campus.

McCrea

So, I guess life growing up before the injury.

Olivas

<topic> Adjusting to disabilities over time/if the disability was acquired</topic>

I was a normal kid. I was very athletic. I was involved in any sport I could do. I kept busy year round. I'm from a real small town in Oklahoma. So, our focus was basketball. So, from August to March it was all about basketball, then track and field, in summer I played baseball. So, I had a normal upbringing. I didn't have any siblings. So, it was pretty much me and the kid that lived in town with me. So it was a very small town in Oklahoma, small, small town like population one hundred. So, that is where I was raised. But, I was a pretty normal kid, very athletic. I kept pretty busy. So, that was probably my biggest challenge after I got injured was just what am I going to do, because I had a lot of energy. I was still thirteen years old, where am I going to put all this energy. Luckily my school, and my whole town, indeed the whole area was very supportive of me and my family. So, it wasn't a huge obstacle. The school I remember had to make a couple of ramps here and there to adapt to me. Because ADA wasn't around in the late 80s, but you know they made the best out of it. They always supported us very well. I still didn't have an outlet as far as athletics, I did drama and acting in high school. That was the extent of my outreach to programs in high school. I didn't do 4H.

It's an agricultural thing, you show animals, because I come from an agricultural and farming community, so, that what things there were to do over there. So, I didn't do all that. But, I had drama and acting. I was the manager of the basketball team. The basketball team in high school, but all I could really do with them was just shooting around and out shoot them in free-throws. That's what I could do. But, I had a normal upbringing after my injury. It was pretty normal.

McCrea

How did your parents react to the injury?

Olivas

<topic>Family attitudes</topic>

Oh gosh! I think, I always thought of it like this. I always thought the transition from getting injured to getting into a chair was harder for my parents than it was for me. Because, from the beginning I had pretty much just committed to this life, and get ready for the obstacles that may come. You know, I was just gung ho; it was partly because I was a teenager and it's about adapting very quickly. I never really looked back on what I had lost. Of course you have your moments, but I never really dwelled on what I didn't have. I kind of just concentrated on what I could still do. But, my parents probably took it harder than I did. So, my parents probably took it a lot harder than I did. Just, you know, emotionally. But, I

tried to make the best of it, with them. But, it probably took them definitely a lot longer to adapt to me being disabled as opposed to me thinking of myself as disabled.

We had to make some changes in the house. We had to add a ramp to get in the front door. And, the bathroom door needed to be increased in width. So, those were the challenges that my dad took upon himself to adapt to. But, I think they definitely took it harder than I did. I always think about that time, and I was ready to go. Just get me into a good chair. And, they were all more concerned what sort of chair and how was it going to enable me. I just wanted to get out there with my fellow classmates, and be a kid still. So, that was my train of thought. Where they were just more concerned with the disability, and what I wasn't going to be able to do any more. Where I knew in my head there wasn't going to be anything that was going to stop me from still being a kid. So, yeah they definitely took it harder than I did.

Just like leaving home. I was ready to gung ho; and come to college. My mom was the one that was real hesitant and wary of me being away from home. You know, it's the same thing.

McCrea

I guess, how did the other students of your high school take it?

Olivas

<topic>General attitudes toward them</topic>

I'm very lucky, I'm very lucky to be a part of a small, small community, whereas opposed to being from a high school with thousands of kids, or even hundreds. I was raised with so many of the same classmates that I had in kindergarten. That was where I think I was very lucky. Everybody adapted to me and the fact that I was in a wheelchair very easily. Because, they didn't look at me as Cezar, disabled Cezar, they just saw me as Cezar that is now in a chair. So, it wasn't bad at all.

I see and hear other stories from other teammates, or people I've met through the years with disabilities. And they were raised in a high school of eight hundred where they barely even know a quarter of their class. It's a little different from me where I knew everybody, even the whole community. I remember receiving letters and cards and I was thirteen, from first and second graders from three towns over. That was the sort of support I had as far as myself. It was two-fold and three-fold, ten-fold because, everybody just supported me and didn't let me ever, ever, get down on myself for anything. This was just the new me in a chair and here we go.

I remember we competed in high school in a one act play. We went to state and I was actually playing an old man in a wheelchair, so the role came along, and it was kind of made for me. We didn't do very well at state, but it was all part of it. It was all part of being raised in my little town. Just being part of it, and everyone kind of supporting me and my family. It was just easy. My best friends now are still from elementary school, still. So, I mean that has nothing to do with me being in a chair. I think we would still be friends today, but that just tells you the sort of community I'm from. It was easy.

McCrea

I think you already talked about this, but what exactly does your company do?

Olivas

<topic>Changes in adaptive technology</topic>

Okay, well honestly I did touch on that a little bit. We make wheelchairs. Our background is in sports obviously. Coming from UTA is what brought us here. Willie who is our original owner, the founder of the

company, he wanted to make a chair, a sports chair that was made for sports specifically. Like I mentioned before we used to adapt our everyday chairs for sports. And he wanted to definitely get away from that and build something for sports specifically. Not just to do that, but also to make our sport better, to make our athletes better.

It's kind like we refined the shoe; this is just an analogy as far as how to kind of make you understand. Where our chair comes in, it's kind of like a tennis shoe. You know, when Michael Jordan blew up in the late 80s and early 90s he endorsed Nike and of course that blew up the shoe. Not only was it a good shoe, not only for Michael to endorse it did it have to be a good shoe, but it had to be able to withstand and actually to outperform other shoes. Well it's the same thing for us, we wanted to take the shoe and make it much better and refine it around athletes and help them enhance the sport and their abilities. I think it is the same thing that we do now.

Nine out of the ten chairs that we ship out a week are for sports. Because, that is just our background, so that is what we do. We make sports chairs and everyday chairs like mine right now, and we ship them around the world now. So that's what we do.

McCrea

How long has the company been around?

Olivas

The company's been around since '99. That's when it started, and I came onboard eight years later.

You mentioned to adapting to life here on campus. Going from having a driver's license to not having a driver's license and driving around. I remember in high school my dad set up my first car with hand controls to drive, that for me back in high school that was like a huge independence, freedom! You know, I get to get in my car and drive somewhere all by myself. Not needing someone to drive me. Anyway, that's a huge aspect of being disabled and just getting another form of independence. For sure it was a big part of growing up.

So, same thing here, coming to campus, and being a part of a university. It's just another form of independence, and stamping that for yourself, I can do this. Just because I'm in a chair, or disabled doesn't mean that I have to be riddled to home and living with parents for the rest of my life. Unfortunately, I've got to see that through my time. You can sometimes see where kids with disabilities are kind of stumped as far as realizing what's out there for them, whether it be college or the workforce or even getting in a car. Simply getting into a car and driving somewhere, you know a lot of times they don't realize those are possibilities. So, it's just the awareness of our lives and being disabled. Sometimes, people don't realize it. What they are able to do, I think that is a big part of us being disabled and being independent. Sometimes, we have to be advocates for ourselves, for us as disabled people. We got to just spread the word, listen you don't have to be riddled to a bed just because you're a paraplegic. You can do anything you want to. Unfortunately, we all get to see that, sometimes you can see that some people are. You can see in their eyes that they don't see the possibilities. Hopefully, myself and others that come through the program are able to shed that. Still today, even in 2016, we can still see that it lacks.

McCrea

When you were here though, were there any specific advocates for you that helped a lot?

Olivas

<topic>Who were their allies/advocates</topic>

My upper classmen were huge for me. Because, even, even me coming from a small community, I remember there was one gentleman while I was in rehab in Amarillo, Texas. And I saw him I think twice. He came by the rehab facility where I was at two times. And, he was probably in his mid-thirties at the time. And I can't remember to this day who it is, but he came in, in a chair like mine, you know, now. He was very built and athletic. I could tell, and he just came in with full life. It left a huge impression on me in many ways. Not just attitude, but also the fact that the independence was important. I think he was married, he got married, and he wasn't married when he got injured.

You know, because a lot of times you're married, it's a funny thing about society, sometimes if you're married people think, and not everyone but, we do get the feedback, sometimes people think that oh! You're so lucky that she stayed with you after your accident. Well, you know, we just got married we met a year ago, and I've been disabled for ten years. People don't realize we're still able to have a normal life. The chair and our disability is just an external thing. Anyhow, he was a big advocate for me. I forgot who he was at the time. But he came in; I think to do exactly that, for the ones who were there. There were like three of us who were newly disabled in this rehab. He came to speak to all of us. Kind of to let us know what the possibilities are. So, um that was a huge deal for me. And it was the middle of high school that I read about UTA and the program that they had here too. That was a big motivational tool for me.

I did want to go to school, but once I read about UTA and what they were doing here and the campus was 90% accessible. Definitely those were big motivational-factors for me, even when I was a sophomore just reading about UTA in high school. It was definitely a motivational thing I think. It was my junior year when I contacted Jim Hayes and I said "Hey, what are the possibilities that I could come join your team." And he goes, "Well you've got a whole year to work on your shooting. How many free-throws can you shoot out of ten?" Those were the questions he asked me. But, anyway that was a big motivation for me. I still wanted to go to school, but that definitely enhanced the possibilities for me and what I could do. I loved sports growing up. So, that was a big plus for me.

So, Jim Hayes honestly did that for me. Even, just the few conversations we had before I came here. I came here my senior year as well, my superintendent in high school brought me. I think he considered it a college day for me. But, he brought me all the way here from a pow-dunk Oklahoma town to UTA. We were here for a couple of days. I got to play with a couple of the guys at the time, and got to meet Jim Hayes. And those are my 2 big advocates. They kind of opened up my eyes to the possibilities, and I kind of just took it from there. It was a huge deal, for sure.

McCrea

There are other universities that started with the whole accessibility movement; did you consider either of them?

Olivas

<topic>Accessibility of school</topic>

Um, you know, not really. I'm a pretty loyal guy, you know if anything I would have maybe considered another school for graduate school, perhaps. My post career to college didn't include that, so perhaps maybe if I would have gone to grad school or even law school somewhere. You know, Illinois has a good law school Perhaps these would have taken me there for sure. Especially, the fact that I was still involved

in sports, just because I go from one school to another doesn't mean that I can't be a part of the tradition.

So, no not at the time, I never thought about transferring or anything like that. I was pretty loyal to UTA, so it's pretty hard to think about going to another school at the time. But, believe me, hearing all the things that Illinois and Alabama, even Arizona, all the steps that they were taking to catch up to UTA and Illinois even somewhat Wisconsin, Wisconsin-Whitewater. Those were the schools that existed at the time, but you started to here in the late-90s, Alabama coming up and Arizona and Missouri even. The University of Missouri has an excellent program now.

So, it's funny, I heard about those schools then, in the late-'90s. But, by the mid-2000s they were pretty well established by the time. Now they've even come further. Alabama's taken huge steps, may have even surpassed us all in the fact the school sports and finances. I don't know if you read anything about Alabama, but they've taken huge steps. Where I hope UTA has taken notice, because Alabama is getting up there. I think the team (at Alabama) has just gotten their own facility. They got their own court, to host games and to practice, and to house the team, for training and what not. And it may be in the works, but supposedly it's definitely going to happen, so I'm hoping everyone takes notice of that, especially UTA, because I'm an alumnus. Hopefully we can keep up, because there are other schools that are taking big strides, and hopefully we can keep up for sure.

McCrea

Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Olivas

I don't know...not really.

McCrea

We've covered interactions, we've covered sports.

Olivas

Sports, interactions, campus living, big supporters for myself.

McCrea

What was winning national championships' like?

Olivas

<topic>Competing in wheelchair basketball</topic>

I was lucky; I was here from '93 to '99 because I think it was after '95 they increased our eligibility from four years to five years. Well in spring of '96 I had surgery on a hip. I had injured myself. So, that year I got medical red-shirted. So, it was after that year that they increased the eligibility for the team from four years to five years. Well that year I had gotten medical red-shirted so it didn't really count, so in all actuality I got an extra year, due to the changes in the eligibility. I'm probably the only one that do you know... the sweatbox? Have you heard of the sweatbox? Well it is where we practice.

They called it the sweatbox for year and years since probably the early 80s, because there was no A/C. And when we would start practicing for the team it was in mid-August. Well mid-August, you know it's the middle of the blistering heat here. Hence, why it was called the sweatbox, because, not only us but anybody that played in that building it was just a big heat box.

I'm probably the only one that dealt with that heat in there for six seasons straight. That place, I think that towards the end of my time on the team we had trainers that were assigned to us from the activities or the athletic department. When I first started on the team nobody cared, you know. We didn't have trainers; we didn't have a lot of things. But towards the time when I graduated, we at least had a trainer that would monitor all of us and make sure nobody dehydrated and do anything like that. But, I think what I read or from our trainers at the time they said we could lose up to twelve pounds of sweat basically in a three-hour period. That's how hot it got in there. That's just how much we sweat, we just couldn't hydrate enough, but, anyway, hence the sweatbox.

You know, now they have it nice and peachy, there's an A/C in there now, so they have nothing to worry about. But, I was probably the only one who had to do that for six seasons, for six August's and September's. It was quite interesting. That's a little story on me. And the little things that we dealt with back then. And, hopefully the fact that we won some championship's in the 90s. Hopefully, that's why they have A/C now. (laughs) But, anyway a little side note on our program.

McCrea

What was the experience of winning national championship's like?

Olivas

<topic>Competing in wheelchair basketball</topic>

You know, my first one, which...I was a freshman. I was kind of just riding the pine taking it all in. I think I played maybe thirty seconds of the championship game when we won. So, I was very raw at the time, very young and raw. So, I just took it all in, and enjoyed it as much as I could. And I got to see it from a step back as opposed to my upper classmen that had been there then. Fotran? and Jason Vanbeek?, they won four championships in a row. My freshman year was their fourth. So, for them go through that, I think that's what you wanted to make as a goal for yourself. So, it was very cool for them to go through that. And I had other teammates that were going through three championships in a row. So, that was very cool.

So, I was still a freshman and very raw, but when we won in '97, that was my championship, as far as I was one of the upper classmen at the time. So, that one was definitely more, had more of my stamp on it because I played in the majority of the game.

McCrea

You're a leader on the team at that point.

Olivas

Yeah! So, definitely the two championships are very different. But, they're both...as a team you don't think of it less than that, because you know what, I was a freshman, but yet the starters were beating up on me in practice. So, I was still part of the team, although I didn't play very many minutes. I was still part of the team and as part of the process we're getting better as a team. I hope the guys now realize this, because you can very easily think you know, yeah I really didn't have very much to do with championship. Well, heck yeah you did. I definitely always thought of it like that. Although, I'm not getting the minutes, you know I'm getting a lot of minutes in practice. And I'm giving at least the starter hell as much as I can. So, that's my job.

McCrea

The practice squad is just as important to winning championships.

Olivas

Exactly! Exactly! That's exactly how you should think about it. So, I never thought it any less of that first championship, believe me. Especially, it being your freshman year, it was brutal for me. Because, I went from just shooting around in high school to full blown practice, from 1 to 4 or 5 o' clock every day, so you know, it was a beating. It was a huge step up, I had no in between. I think Jim Hayes called me in the middle of July after I had graduated high school. He called me middle of July and goes "Son are you ready to come down here and be a part of the team?" So, I had less than a month to really prepare to what was to come. And, still I didn't even know at the time. But, when we won in '97 definitely a lot of rejoice there too. Because it was just a different team, I was still there obviously, but there were only two or three of us that were there since '93 or '94. So, yeah just as good, you know, reaching that goal is all part of it, every year. It's too bad I only got two of them. (laughs) But it's two more than some other teammates have gotten, so I can't complain. It was fun.

McCrea

Sounds like you guys were like the Duke of wheelchair basketball.

Olivas

You know what, we probably were in the '90s, but we need to reestablish it for sure.

McCrea

Women won this year.

Olivas

Yeah they just won. Yeah last weekend, and the men lost. Barely got third place, but hey it's part of it. And that is what I was saying about these other schools. We've got to be able to keep up with them. We haven't won in a while, the men. So it just kind of tells you with the other schools how far they have come. Because, wheelchair basketball in the '90s it was really down to three schools. You know, we didn't have a whole lot of schools that even have university teams. But of the ones that there were around there were probably seven or eight in the '90s, and three of them dominated; Illinois, UTA, University of

Wisconsin-Whitewater. We pretty much dominated the '90s. But, once 2000 hit Alabama started to pick up and Missouri, you know UTA, Illinois and Wisconsin-Whitewater were still up there, but we're starting to look back a little more than usual.

McCrea

I guess that's true of all sports programs though they sort of go through up's and down's.

Olivas

Of course, of course, as far as that it's all great for us. Us who have gone through at least this program my background, and I'm alumni of UTA, but the grand goal is to just get our sport out there, and be recognized on campus and off campus as well, for being athletes. Because a lot of times we're not looked at as athletes, and for the time we put in. You know, we know that we're athletes, but sometimes it's overlooked. It's a constant battle for us and being athletes of this sport is just part of it. Unfortunately, people think of us as disabled when we're playing wheelchair basketball.

Which is the furthest thing possible is to think of wheelchair basketball as disabled. The wheel chair is what gets us there, but it's not what defines us. Because, we're anything but disabled when we're out there playing, you know tumbling and rolling around. That's the beauty of the sport. It's been years now that there have been talks about making wheelchair basketball open to anyone. Not for just people with disabilities, but for anyone. I don't know what's going to become of it, but in a weird sort of way you want it to get there, because it kind of opens the door for anyone to get in a wheelchair and play.

McCrea

Because, it turns it more mainstream.

Olivas

<topic>Competing in wheelchair basketball</topic>

Absolutely, I'm sure for the old school. I mean for the old people, the old school probably don't want to go that far, but for someone who has been through the sports and is still kind of involved, you know, to make it mainstream would enhance the recognition of it just even more. Because, hopefully what that would do is not make it seem that it's only for disabled people. You know, it's all about your ability. It's still a sport. It's still got its rules and regulations, just like any other sport. Just anybody can get in it. Go ahead, if you think you can beat me one-on-one let's do it. So, that's just it. Us as athletes in our sport we want anybody and everybody to be able to get into it. So, we can take them to school. (laughter) Because, it's what we know, I'll challenge anybody from any other sport, just like they would be happy to challenge me in BMX, obviously. Somebody who is into extreme sports they'll gladly hand their bike over to somebody and say "You think you can do a trick off this ramp here's my bike. Go ahead and do it."

McCrea

Just like someone who is athletic at football; you're not necessarily going to be great at basketball or baseball.

Olivas

Exactly! So, it's how we feel about our sport. And making it mainstream would allow that, perhaps it would give us a little more respect, you know, as athletes. So who knows what will happen there, you know, there are powers that be that are keeping that from happening right now. The thing is there is a lot of funding that goes into disabled sports, so if you open it up to everyone that may impede some of that funding. So, I see that, I could totally see that, because that is how things have been since the 70s. Since, wheelchair basketball has been around, the funding that we would get for the sport through the disabled channels or donations or what not. Would we still get those things if it went mainstream? That is the thing that impedes probably that process. So who knows?