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14) Opening remarks by Joe Wootten, head boys' basketball coach, Bishop O'Connell High School, Arlington, VA

JOE WOOTTEN: Thank you, thank you for having me. A couple of things that I just would like to mention. I know I give a little different perspective as far as I'm a high school coach so I see the recruiting from a little different than Scottie and Ruth and Myron would see it.

I really think that in the last five to seven years that the influence of money from all different corporations has become three or four times worse. And I know you made a joke that five years puts you out of the modern age but even in those five to seven years things have changed tremendously. I know from a basketball standpoint the influence of money from AAU coaches is tremendous. The funny thing that I think is, obviously you're looking at it from an NCAA standpoint. I look at it just from the recruiting of which AAU team you're going to be on.

I know Scottie can probably feel this. He probably got as many calls of which AAU team he was going to be on when he was a sophomore and a junior in high school, than he did from college coaches. And I guarantee that he was probably offered money by them and his parents were offered money and I know they're people of value, but I've seen people offered three, four, five, ten, fifteen thousand dollars so they would play on a certain AAU team. So forget even the college recruiting process, it's gotten down.

The question is this, and I know this is tough for me as a high school coach, is that most AAU coaches and I'm not saying all the AAU coaches are bad, there's obviously some good people that want to work with young men and women, but a lot of them, their full time job is to be a coach and so they actually recruit probably ten times more than any NCAA coach ever does.

Puts more time in than, you know, Karl Hobbs here at GW or Gary Williams or John Thompson, and those guys are great coaches, but there's no way they could do it. And all they really have to worry about is putting together a team. And as a result, what ends up happening is, they are not responsible to anyone.

They're not responsible—I know I'm responsible to a principal, a president and the school board. And in no way are all high school coaches perfect. I don't want to pretend that that's the case. But because of this unsanctioned kind of they're only responsible to themselves, it allows a forum for there to be a lot of corruption.

And I think one of the things that I think is a challenge from the NCAA is the main recruiting period for colleges, like Scottie that he got seen at the ABCD Camp, Ruth Riley obviously with her AAU team, is not under the sanction of anyone other than the AAU coaches. And so therefore they're not responsible to high school principals and they can do whatever they'd like and this is kind of unseemly, but I've had a player in the past that his AAU coach took him to Vegas, bought the members of the team prostitutes, gave them drugs.

And I know that's kind of shocking but I think that's probably the rule rather than the exception. It's really gotten bad as far as the AAU goes in terms of that. And again, I'm not trying to pretend all high school coaches are perfect and in no way am I trying to pretend all AAU coaches are bad. But I think that's one of the big challenges that you have is that the recruiting period in the NCAA allows, it really caters to the non-high school coaches.

And I will say this: It wouldn't make my job easier if you got rid of AAU and in some ways, because then I'd have to field all the college coaches. So I'm not in any way that we should control it but the idea being is I think the influences that have come where so much money is exchanging hands that's well before, that has nothing to do with the college coach, that has nothing to do with the high school.

But unless you have strong parents I think it's easier for a kid to become corrupted and the kid to think, well, it's all about me, it's all about what I want to do, it's all about, it's not about the team.

And I actually, Scottie made a joke about that people gave him a hard time. I actually really admire Scottie that he was on a team where, you know, he was the best player probably from his sophomore year on and I think he really did a great job of taking that team and building it into a national contender through his three years. And I think there's something special about that where kids make a decision, they go to a school and they stay there. I'm amazed, and I think again this is the influence of corporate I think in a lot of ways where kids will change high school and Scottie and those guys he probably played AAU with four, five, six times. I mean, I know guys that have changed high school five times and it's just unfortunate because I think again the money is such a factor.

And I remember back, I'm sure Ruth can remember this, but ten years ago if you were on a high school team or an AAU team and you got one pair of shoes, you were excited, wow, we got one pair. Now if you give, you know, if your team gets only one pair of shoes they look at you and say, coach, you know, what's going on? And again, not that that's everything but I think it starts to change the culture of the kids and I can tell you this, they have a lot tougher road right now because of those influences that come. I can tell you this right now, we're in the middle of our high school season, we have one player, his name is Jason Clark, he's a sophomore and he's a tremendously talented player for us, I have at least twelve AAU coaches that are trying to get him to play for them. He gets called every single night and he hasn't even hit the college recruiting process yet.

So again I think that's a challenge that probably doesn't get talked about quite as much because it's obviously not as much under the NCAA's purview.

But it could be I think if the NCAA were to say, hey, we're going to stop the summer recruiting, make it go to the high school coaches and then people that wanted to play AAU, they would do it for the reasons of, hey, I want to work with kids, not to influence where they're going to colleges, and I think that would be really important.

DR. TURNER: Thank you. Thank you. That will be information I'm sure we'll come back to, to say the least.