

10-3-1989

Interview no. 783

Milton Ottey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Milton Ottey by Dr. Charles Martin, 1989, "Interview no. 783," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Milton Ottey
INTERVIEWER: Charles Martin
PROJECT: History of the University
DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 3, 1989
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO: 783
TRANSCRIPT NO: 783
TRANSCRIBER: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in Jamaica, raised in Canada, came to UTEP in 1980 on a track scholarship; student-athlete at UTEP 1980-85, 1989-90.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Describes first impressions of El Paso; compares educational systems in Canada and U.S; tells about his track career as a high jumper including competition in 1984 Olympics, gold medals at the Commonwealth Games in 1982 and 1986; discussion of UTEP's coaching staff; comments about track team members Bert Cameron and S. Nyambui and comments on high numbers of foreign athletes on Ted Bank's UTEP track team; describes UTEP's winning the NCAA indoor track championship.

Length of Interview: 45 minutes Length of Transcript 21 pages

Milton Ottey
October 3, 1989
Charles H. Martin
UTEP 75th Anniversary (Diamond Jubilee)

This is an interview conducted in El Paso, on October 3, 1989 by Charles Martin with Milton Ottey.

M: All right, it seems to be working now for reasons that are unknown to us. Who are we to complain. All right, now we can go back to where we were in our frame of mind fifteen minutes ago. I would like to do is start out with just a brief description of where you were born and where you grew up? And where you went to preparatory school or secondary school or whatever they would call it?

O: Okay, I was born in Jamaica. I moved to Canada when I was ten years old and lived in Toronto. I attended several high schools, Timothy Eden being the last.

O: Timothy Eden?

M: Secondary school.

O: Okay and you graduated or . . .

M: I graduated in 1979.

M: How did you, well what kind of athletic career did you have during your final years? How did you then learn about the University of Texas at El Paso?

O: Well, 1979 I basically became a high jumper at Van. I'd been told that I could have been any athlete I wanted, whether it's football, basketball or volleyball or whatever, in whatever, track or field. I excelled quicker in the high jump and I enjoyed it so I kept with it. I sent letters off to various universities in the fall of '78. Sent one off to Berkeley, California. John Wedell, who was the assistant coach there,

got in touch with me. I chose not to take a scholarship that year, '79, because I wanted to wait and train for the Olympics, in '80. Unfortunately, we boycotted. I got back to Wedell, in Berkeley, and found out that he had moved here to El Paso. He received the letter that Berkeley had sent him. He got quickly back in touch with me; brought me down for a visit. And here I am.

M: Okay. What were your first impressions of El Paso, when you arrived?

O: My recruiting trip or . . .

M: . . . either your recruiting trip and or when you first came here permanently?

O: Well, I'd never heard of UTEP. I'd never heard of El Paso. Well, the only time I'd ever heard of El Paso was in the westerns and that sounds real funny. I had an image coming in because when the plane landed I couldn't even see the city. All I saw was desert and tumble weeds or whatever have you until the plane turned around and docked. My image was like, 'This is in the desert.' It's like I visioned something like, something with a stone walls around it, an oasis or something like. After the plane turned around I started breathing a little easier when I saw the city. It was a bit scary. It was a bit scary. Because you're talking to someone who's used to green. You know: green trees, green grass. You know a lot of trees around. It's a big difference.

M: What was your first impression coming over to the campus or first impressions of coming to the campus?

O: I liked the campus. I liked the architectural [style], how they build their buildings, the Aztec style. Other than the fact that it wasn't green I thought it was acceptable. El Paso itself: I figured I was coming here for two reasons: one was to do track, and two was to get an

education. So obviously I liked it enough so that I signed on.

M: How did it feel going from north of the border down to the southern border in terms of the mixed culture here, the southwestern culture, and the border culture with Mexico here?

O: I can't remember feeling anything really different other than the fact that it's extremely hot. I think I adapted quite well to El Paso. I got a little homesick. I enjoy Mexican. You know, I like hot spicy things. That's a Caribbean part of me. Other than the fact that I missed home I didn't really find El Paso all that bad, although it was very boring because unless you have a car here you can't really get off and do anything.

M: Right. Did you notice any particular differences that stand out in your mind between the Canadian educational system and the American educational system?

O: In Canada even if you take the universities, you know you have colleges and you have universities and there's a big difference. In United States there's so many different colleges, junior colleges, city colleges, state colleges that I think the standards have dropped tremendously. The educational level is not quite as high. Also you take Canada which is also part of the commonwealth and related to England, it still has a bit of the English educational system involved in it.

M: Okay, why don't you describe your career here at UTEP, kind of chronologically, as an individual and then we'll come back and talk a little bit more about your teammates and the team success?

O: Okay. Well, I arrived here in the fall of '80, 1980. I had a good coach John Wedell. He taught me a lot. The first year indoors I took second in indoor track and field, NCAA's, second outdoors NCAA's. Fairly successful

year. I improved by about five centimeters. The fall of the second year, 1982, I improved tremendously. I won at the end of the year. I had completed 30 something competitions and ended up with 26 straight wins. Received the number one ranking in the world. Had the highest high jump anyone has ever had. Very successful, I would gather. The following year I broke my leg, really curtailed it, 1983.

M: How did you break your leg?

O: I was high jumping. It was the 21st of February in Los Angeles, approximately 9:30 in the evening. And that kind of curtailed things. Fortunate for me, less than four or five months after I broke my leg I was back in stiff competition. I placed 9th at the world championship in Helsinki 1984.

M: Hold on. When were these world championships?

O: They were in August of 1983.

M: And you placed 9th. Now in these first two years had you set a personal, I mean always you set a personal best, but do you remember particularly what your best was at that time? I'm trying to remember you said that you kind of set the record for NCAA or something?

O: Well, I held the NCAA record. I had many records, track records, UTEP record, Canadian commonwealth record, numerous records. But as my own personal goals I don't try to set any. I just try to jump as best as I can and as high as I can. So each year -- you know say it'd be nice if I jumped x but first let's win before we think of jumping. Right. So I've never gone to a year of saying, you know, this is my goal that I want to jump.

M: Okay. So you had these two years of considerable success in the NAAs and then you had the injury, you begin to come back.

Ottey

O: Yeah, '83 I placed I think 5th, 4th or 5th on the indoors. The Olympic year, '84, I can't remember whether or not I have any eligibility left then. But I remember at the Olympic Games I placed 6th.

M: These were the games in?

O: Los Angeles.

M: Representing?

O: Canada. '85, very successful jump: 7'7 and a quarter.

M: Where did you do that jump?

O: Oh, gosh I don't know. I've been in so many meets. Exactly where I jumped that one I couldn't really pin point for you.

M: Was that your career high?

O: No.

M: Okay, we're coming to that.

O: My best year after '82 was 1986. The Commonwealth Games would be the major competition. This year I won Everstadt, which is the unofficial high jump, world high jump championships. I jumped that at 7'6 and had a of series of 7'6, 7'7's in about five or six competitions. I made (???) Canadian Championships, in July I jumped 7'7 3/4, which is my career best. In '80 yeah, I went on to winning the Commonwealth Games.

M: Okay, why don't you describe just briefly where they were and what the Commonwealth Games are and then how you did in the... .

O: Well, the Commonwealth Games are of the ex-British Colonies, you know which is Canada to Carribean and supposedly South Africa but they're no longer eligible for competition, but any country that had ties with Great Britian. The Commonwealth Games have been around for numerous years. It's not recognized in the world, seen as a big major competition but as far as the Commonwealth goes it's one of the major ones. I won in 1982;

Ottey

I won it in 1986. Just to get ahead of things this year, January will be my third Commonwealth Games and I'm going for my third gold medal which is unprecedented today. I guess that's the word.

M: Where were these held in those years when you competed?

O: '82 it was held in Brisbane, Australia in September, October. '86 it was held in Scotland in August, very cold and unpredictable weather. And next year January will be in New Zealand, Auckland.

M: Now when you [participated in] these Commonwealth Games you also ran into some other UTEP athletes as well?

O: Oh yeah. In 1982 in Australia, if we had totaled the amount of medals that were won by UTEP athletes, we would have won the Commonwealth Games, on medal counts. Nyambui to (???) to Bert Cameron, [to] myself to all the other Nigerians and Africans that were here. I thought we had a pretty good representative there.

M: I would think so. Okay, now you mentioned that you were particularly coached by John Wedell. You might mention who the head coach was at that time and who the other coaches were and where they recruited athletes from.

O: Well, when I came here to UTEP, Ted Banks was the head coach; John Wedell was the assistant men's and women's; Collin Thurston was a grad-assistant and Courtney. I can't really remember who else were assistants also. John was basically involved with my program. He took care of my program and he was the only one involved with that. Ted on the other hand overseed everything. He was more concerned with the distant runners. But as a head coach, he does make the decisions; what's what and what's what.

M: Now what was their philosophy on where they would recruit athletes from?

O: Well, Ted liked to go foreign because it's a field that's on tap; it's a lot of our athletes and a lot of them are very good. For instance, we had the Nigerian, the African, what was it the Tanzanian connection which would be Nymbui because he spoke the language. He knew what's going on over there and he's willing to help his countrymen out by bringing him here for, you know educational purposes and also to run. And since they do it naturally there because apparently they run from their house to school, so it's a natural process. El Paso is very much like Tanzania, from what I hear. So this became more or less a pipeline or so the sport writers or track and field news and all these other track and field magazines would put it. You know UTEP was the foreign pipeline. Now the ironic thing about the whole situation was that schools that were against UTEP, like for instance UCLA. when they were the tops they won with numerous foreign athletes also, for instance, Don Quarry. Don Quarry, you know and a lot of Jamaicans and people from the islands and such. But because they weren't winning and [were losing to teams that] had a lot of Africans, at least this is my impression, they were against it. It's like they all of the sudden decided that, okay UTEP is winning the NCAAs and the Triple Crowns and all these championships but they won it with foreign athletes, so they're not being American. They all of the sudden became anti-American. They became xenophobes. Ted would also get t-shirts made up everytime we won a championships and it was by Nike or they were donated or something. As soon as it was announced that we won the title we'd all get these t-shirts and we'd put it on. It would say, "UTEP El Paso NCAA Champions" for that year and on the back it would say, "Don't be Xenophobic." Right. So to us that was real hilarious because we were winning everything but although the other schools would

say, "yeah, yeah, but you're a foreigner." We looked at that as being sour grapes. Because as I saw it a foreigner or an American were all athletes once you put the shoes on and we're on the track and it's up to you to beat me. The rules say I'm supposed to be here and I can be here, so what's this.

M: Sure. And did these schools eventually themselves then... ?

O: A lot of them were very teed off at UTEP because they also would try to get athletes from the same area but they couldn't do it. You know we've had rumors that x school was trying to get athlete and the kid shows up at the college with the same name but it's not the same person, so they wasted a year. They wasted a scholarship, you know, on somebody who they didn't know nothing about because they didn't know anything about the person. But we had the connections where we insured that we got the right persons.

M: Did Banks ever travel over there or some other people travel?

O: I don't recall Ted taking a recruiting trip. I mean we're talking almost ten years now but I can't remember him taking a recruiting trip.

M: Do you rely on people that... ?

O: On people, yes. You know, like the athletes, we ourselves were ambassadors of UTEP. We go ahead and weed out, find somebody. We'd say, "You know, there's this athlete here and there's this athlete there," and we'd get in touch with them; be it from Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Bahamas. Okay.

M: Okay. We're talking about your accomplishments perhaps, we should mention then how well the teams were doing during those years also?

O: The other UTEP teams?

M: Well no, the indoor and outdoor teams specifically? We mentioned it in

passing. I want to go back on this topic specifically.

O: Well uh.

M: Each year, how they were doing?

O: Each year we did well, although in 1983 which is when Banks left and a lot of other things started happening in the university. My first year I was very impressed with the people that were here. I came here because I wanted the best. From the resume I saw the plaques, the trophies and the people that were here, it was no doubt in my mind that if I came here I would be the best. That's how it was. With Bert Cameron, who I'd met a year earlier, [and] Nymbui.

M: Okay. Why don't you tell me a little bit about Bert?

O: Bert, Bert's a kid. Bert and I are very good friends. We met in 1979 at the World Cup in Montreal. We got to be pretty good. In fact when I was down here for my recruiting trip, he took care of me. We understand each other because we are from the same island. And that to me was a plus for UTEP because I had somebody I could relate to. Bert is a wild guy. He's like a kid but he could run like a horse.

M: And how successful was he?

O: Bert was very, very successful. He won his first NCAA while at UTEP; number one in the world, 1982, and 1983 world champion. Unfortunately, 1984 would have been his greatest year and I can't know if you can remember seeing this runner in the semi-finals. He started out, he was favorite for the gold medal, [he started out] at a 100 meters into the race, he like went up into the air grabbed his hamstring came down, stop, came to a complete stop. Everybody else was at least 50 yards ahead of him. He got back running and ran so hard to qualify. In a 400 you don't come to a dead stop and then do that you know. And he just qualified.

He just barely qualified. The ironic thing about it was that if he hadn't of done it, he would have been in shape to run the finals and that's it. But because he ran to qualify to make it to the finals he hurt his hamstring so badly that he could not even walk the next day. I really felt it for Bert because I knew he had the gold medal. For an athlete at the world class level I have experienced it and he's experienced it and a lot of athletes have experienced it: the injuries. It's very hard to come back from, not because you got worse but because of the time you took off everybody else has improved. And you have to come back to the state that you were and then work again. So you're in the hole no matter what you do. And those are the problems or the occupational hazards of an international track athlete.

M: Why don't you tell me a little bit about the African distance runners and their successes?

O: Well, I don't know, you know, because we had so many here we never really... . We didn't speak really, we didn't hang out, we didn't talk like Bert and I did. Nyambui is a man I respect a great deal. Here we are a man -- you know take a young athlete coming into the program -- he has so much titles underneath him: a silver medal in '80 Olympics. He was just down to earth. He was still living in the dorms, had a roommate. You know he speaks to everybody although half the time you couldn't understand Nyambui was saying. But he speaks to everybody and he loves kids. He's like "Ah man, you are crazy man," you know. He's just a joy to be with. It was a great asset for me to have Nyambui here or to have [him] in my life. I still respect him. I wish the man could run forever but unfortunately we can't. He is a great person away from the track. He helped his fellow man, his fellow countrymen, to better

themselves, to get a better education and I don't see him as being very selfish.

M: And there are some other successful athletes at that time too: people like Steve Hannon, perhaps, or Shahonga and others.

O: Well Shahonga, Zack Mitswartu . . . there's so many. They all hit on Steve. Steve was my roommate my first year; he's a different guy, different attitude from what I have.

M: Where was he from?

O: He was from Bahamas, triple jumper. He is very, very, very talented. Very talented triple jumper but Steve just did not know how handle it. He just did not know how to work hard and become what he could have become. He could have been one of the greatest I think but because of his personality he would clam up sometimes. He would talk to you when he felt like it. He didn't trust anyone; he was always competing against everybody, when there's no point to be competing. So he wasn't very well looked upon but he was fairly respected as a triple jumper but as a person away from that I personally just say, "Well, Steve was Steve."

M: Well, how did all these people, since you have kind of a United Nations in a way or Commonwealth games, a United Nations contingent, what were the personal dynamics of having people from so many different backgrounds?

O: Well it teaches you, you know that your own little world is not necessarily what you think it is. You take America, you know, America is so caught up (and I'm not knocking America) but it's true, it's such a big country that other than the border countries, Central America has no clues of what's going on in the rest of the world, they think that America is the world. UTEP had the unique opportunity where you had so

many people: I mean you have the Mexicans, you have the Canadians, you have the Caribbeans, your Nigerians, the Africans, whatever have you, that being in one area you see that there is a difference. Your own perspective on things is not necessarily the way it is. So you learn about different cultures. You know, I've seen these guys cook, you know the Africans cook things. You know I look it and I'm like, "You guys are serious." You know the smell but you taste the thing and it's good. So it opens up your mind to different cultures, to different things and that's something that I didn't think that the Foreign Students Office took advantage of. You have the Foreign Students Office but you literally have a melting pot, that's what America is all about right, it's a melting pot, but nobody took advantage of it; nobody really cared.

M: Just for the record now, the team championships during this period. Do remember offhand which years that you won the NCAA team championships?

O: Every year that I was here that I was actively competing we won the team championships. Pontiac, Michigan 1981 we won it, indoors. Outdoors we won it in Baton Rouge. '82 we won it indoors I think it was; I think it was Pontiac Michigan again, or either the . . . what they call that dome in Michigan?

M: Silverdome, something Dome?

O: Something dome, one of those domes . . .

M: Pontiac Dome . . . [Pontiac Silver Dome]

O: Pontiac, Pontiac. In Pontiac, Michigan, we won that and that was the first year they had it there. We look at 1982 in Provo, Utah. We had that hands down.

M: That was the outdoor.

O: Yeah, I think that's the last we won, and that was under the guidance of

Coach John Wedell. That's after Ted Banks left.

M: So during that period of time the Miners then were the... ?

O: We were ... UTEP was the school to be reckoned with. I don't care what other school came in, once we walked on the turf with our uniform on, everybody knew who we were and they knew they had to beat us. At least that's the way we saw it. The coaches, on the other hand, were very nervous; the athletes were very confident [laughter]. There was and maybe I should get into this ... there was a sense of pride with this team. The team knew what they had to do. We had freedom to do what we will. We went on a trip; we stayed in nice hotels, not great hotels, but we stayed away from the dorms. We got our pocket money and there were very little restrictions on us and I think that was good for us at the time. We were mature adults.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

[BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO]

O: Yeah, everybody did their job and if you didn't, the next morning you'd hear from the coach in the office. So you had your freedom but if you messed up you knew you were going to get it. Ted Banks was a man that I was not too close with, but I respected him. He promised something . . . he promised me when I came, when I signed my letter of intent, that he'd get me a new high jump pit and new uprights; he got it for me. He made a promise he'd tried his best to keep it and I can respect that. He never did respect me, personally. I don't know what was going on in the man's business. I knew he wanted to win. The pride of the team was so great you didn't want to let it down. You didn't want to let the team down; you wanted to do your job to the best of your ability. You come and you

work hard and when competition time came, you gave it all you have. Because all we had then was ourselves because we did not feel any support from the University as far as the public goes. As far as the community, I think they got so used to us winning that they took it for granted. They wouldn't come out to the track meets because "Oh yeah, they're all foreigners" and that's what we heard. "When are you going to get some Americans on your team; when you get this, when you get that." And you know football was winning their one game per year and they were getting whatever they want. The basketball players who--you know this might sound a bit bitter because I did feel bitterness at the time and I still do now--and the basketball team who won one championship in 1966 and that's all we heard about, "Texas Western 1966 Champion" and then you walk into the Union and you see this thing advertising their championships and here we are. You know, we've won triple crowns; we won mega NCAA championships. Nobody cared. Nobody wanted to say, "Hey, way to go." And the hurt that I felt and the hurt the other athletes felt that the community raised such a big fuss over the basketball team winning WAC, you know, and here we are coming back from an NCAA Championship and there was no recognition given. But everybody went crazy for basketball because they won WAC. WAC was important to us but we won WAC no problem but nobody cared other than ourselves. We cared about ourselves. One thing that stood out, this is after Ted left, this after John left, and we went back to Pontiac, Michigan in 1983, Indoors, and it was very skippy whether or not we'd win or not. And we came back with the NCAA championship. And that's the same year that the Miner's basketball team did not, I think, get invited to the NIT.

M: They got left out of both one of those years.

Ottey

O: And there was such a big ruckus about it that the community threw them a parade down Mesa. And here we are coming in that evening and that's what we're hearing is about a parade that's been thrown for the basketball team because they did not make some basketball game. And we're walking in with an NCAA trophy and there's one camera there to meet us, "Oh by the way, guys, congratulations." Not very much appreciated. I have a ring; they finally decided to give us rings for NCs, which I think John Wedell got for us, and they told us that they'd be going back on giving us diamond chips in them. They'll give us one now but when you graduate you get the rest. I will graduate in December. I'm wondering if I'm going to get my diamond chips and my ring. But I went over to Silverman's a couple days ago and I see a big display of the rings that are made up for the basketball team for winning WAC. It's not the lady's fault, don't get me wrong. But as a guy who's been on NCAA numerous winning teams, and I standing in a place where they're putting in a shrine, if you will, for a basketball team who wins WAC and the lady is speaking so proudly, which she does have reason to be proud, you know she's representing something. But she's speaking to somebody who's an NCAA champion who's won NCAA championships. But she's so proud, "Oh yes we make up so many rings for them everytime they win a WAC." And I think back: I'm an NCAA champ, numerous times on the team. What do I have to show for it? I don't have a ring that says "NCAAs" that I can feel proud of. Once again, the coach came up to me and says, he heard the conversation, Coach Kitchens, and he says, "How do you feel." I said, "Like shit." And he says, "I know. I can tell." If that's Silverman's fault, it's not the lady's fault. But I think this University needs to recognize what they have from what they don't have. They have a hell of

Ottey

a track team, one that can not be matched again as far as the United States goes in collegiate and they just dumped on us.

M: It seems like track, in general, has lost some of the public following because 20 years ago when I was in high school, even high school track attracted great attention. They talked about tremendous attendance before I came here at some of these meetings with 10,000 people showing up for them. And it seems like there's just been a decline... .

O: Well, it went down because I think they just got used to us winning or they just wanted to see Americans. They wanted more and more Americans on the team but then when we started losing, when Heidleberg came in and all this stuff happened, we're on a suspension and you know the team was not up where it should be. I heard rumors, "Oh yeah. Why aren't guys winning anymore." And I think the public all of a sudden realized what they had.

M: Sometimes you don't appreciate something until you lose it.

O: That's right. And I think that's the whole thing. I just hope that now, we have a good coach here. We have a good staff: myself, ex-Miner, still hoping to graduate this Christmas, Nolbert Elliot member of a winning team, Head Scott member of a winning team, and we have an interest in the program to build it and to do the best job we can -- possibly can with the athletes we have. We've been recruiting like crazy. I think right now we have a very good team. Most of them are from El Paso here, and they're very talented kids and they all want to work hard. I feel they know that the coaches now are interested as a person as well as an athlete and a student and that's the image we're trying to project to them because we want them to graduate. I personally don't want anyone to be like me. You know, I wish I finished my education years ago, but

Ottey

unfortunately track had taken a presence in my life where I could make a living out of it. It's still paying for a lot of things for me and I've done a lot. It's not everybody that is capable of doing that. If you can all the more power to you, but please I hope everybody gets their education because right now if I'd gotten it I would have an assistant coach instead of grad assistant. But I don't know, if I'd graduated already I would not have applied for it. Tit for tat; you deal the cards you've got. Hey that's pretty good. [Laughter] I'm very happy with the program we have now.

M: So you think the future definitely looks on the upswing?

O: Yeah. I definitely think so. Coach Kitchens is a very good man and we can do it. We can build it. But I don't know what's going on with football, and once again, looks like since I came back, football started losing again. I left they started winning, so [laughter].

M: My wife, she once went to Mexico and we beat, we upset BYU the defending champions. "Maybe they should pay me to go to Mexico more often."

O: And so in that area I think things are looking up but we need the people to concentrate on us. I think track, maybe I'm a bit biased, but track is the best thing UTEP has as far as athletics go. It is the best future.

O: One or two last questions quickly here. When you were competing, how difficult was it to juggle the academic side with the demands of training and competing?

M: Many people say you can do both. At the level where I was, I was an elite athlete like many of the athletes here were elite. We were the best in our fields or one of the best in our fields. I'd be on the track from two o'clock until six-thirty working. Then I gotta go home, go back

Ottey

to the dorms, eat, study, catch a good night sleep and then get up and go to class the next morning. Not to mention when you're traveling, you leave here Friday morning or Friday afternoon if you have a double header, which can range from LA to New York back to El Paso and that's on the weekend and I have to get up for class Monday morning. It takes its toll. Track became my number one focus. During exam times I'll still be working out because that's what makes my living. I mean this what built Maltaldi, this is what made Maltaldi what he is. I got to see half of the world without paying for it, really. Education wise I've realized now [that] I should have concentrated a little bit more on it. I should have concentrated on classes I was taking to insure that I graduated. It is a hard job. A lot of the civilians, a lot of the kids out there, they think just because you're an athlete, I don't think they judge us from football players and basketball players because you're an athlete on scholarship you get special privileges. What they don't understand is that the classes that I missed I have to get the notes for them. I have to make up the test that I missed. I have to catch up on things that I do miss. I may not be in class but I have to catch up on things. So my job is twice as hard. You might have a job but you're here in the city at all times. If I don't compete I don't get my education. If I don't get my education, I don't compete. It's two full-time jobs carried out at the same time. It can be done but sacrifices have to be made. You've got to know what you want. Some people are into track or into athletics just to get an education. All the more power to them people. Then there are the elite people who are in it because they want to be the best they can be. And we can not look at them. I've had professors here, you know when I finished my eligibility ... I couldn't understand this frame of

mind. The professor says to me, "Oh, since you're know longer competing for the school you cannot be excused for missing for a track meet." And I'm like: this is my job. This is what pays me. It is my job. I'll make up the work that has to be done. "Sorry if you're not in class three times I'll drop you." You know, are professors in this thing for teaching or because I am the professor. If there's an athlete who's doing, or if there's a person who is doing something with their life, away from this, why can't you see that this person is trying to better themselves by doing this and trying to get an education at the same time. As an educator you shouldn't have that tunnel vision that "Education is the thing." There's guys who dropped out of high school who are making more money than a professor right now.

M: Oh yes, we are well aware of that.

O: Right. So what I couldn't understand is that, is he an educator or an idiot.

M: Very inflexible.

O: Understand that there are things more important but this person has taken the time to say "I'm doing this but I can still do this and better myself." Just because your thing is education doesn't mean this guy's thing is education. And I think those are the kinds of things we need to look at. It's that we need to help everybody as much as possible and be flexible. I'm not saying break the rules, understand that. Each person's different. One thing I've tried to do with my athletes is that I can't take everybody and judge them underneath the same rules. You do what you can do to what your body feels like today. I don't expect you to keep up with someone who has been training for four years at the university level. I don't expect you to run like him; I expect you to run the way

Ottey

you can run, but I expect 100 percent. Because you might be giving it a 100 percent, the guy ahead of you might be giving 50 percent, you're going to improve; he's not. Right now he looks like he's doing a hell of a lot better than you but in reality you are doing a hell of a lot better him. And that is my concept.

M: Is there anything I didn't ask you?

O: Well, I don't know. Nope, I don't think so. Social activities, yes. There's very little in El Paso unless you have a car. [Laughter]

M: Yes, we're a car oriented society.

O: I must say though, when I was going to school here I hated El Paso. I didn't see anything good about El Paso. One I didn't have a car really. My mentality [then compared to now] was totally different. Coming back here in a job type of situation I have a different outlook on El Paso. I don't necessarily love it but my perspective on El Paso changed. Maybe I'm a little bit more mature. I'm not so much partying as I probably would have been. It's not a bad place. It's pretty good.

M: Maybe the dullness kept you out of trouble.

O: [Laughter] Maybe that's right too. But looking at it right now, I would recommend El Paso to anybody who is interested in track not just because I'm a coach because if you're interested in being the best you can be what you want to in any environment. El Paso is not the most exciting; it's not a California, it's not Cal-Berkeley, it's not a USC [or] UCLA where you can find excitement. Here it's there, if you want to find it. There's Juarez if you really want it. There's Monopoly's. There's all these other things going on. But the distractions is something you have to look for. Distractions is not something that's going to find you. If you want an education come here. If you want to do track come here, and

Ottey

you can do both.

M: Sounds good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]