



After the Buzzer

Episode 17: Part 2: Incoming Missouri Valley Conference Commissioner
Jeff Jackson

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Bob Wallace: Welcome to After the Buzzer where we talk to sports leaders about what keeps them busy during the ever-changing, fast moving world of sports. I'm Bob Wallace, Partner and Chair of the Sports Law group at Thompson Coburn, a nationwide law firm that has offices in St. Louis, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. Thanks for joining me for another episode of our podcast. Our last hot podcast episode highlighted outgoing Missouri Valley accomplished Commissioner, Doug Elgin. Today, we have a chance to interview the man replacing him, Jeff Jackson. Jeff comes to the MVC from the Big 12 conference where he was executive associate commissioner of men's basketball and game management. His duties there were to oversee men's basketball, working directly with Big 12 coaches, administrators and the officiating programs while coordinating the Philips 66 Big 12 men's basketball championship. Jeff was well-equipped with that responsibility because he had a 30 year college basketball career including seven seasons as head coach at Berman and three years as head coach in New Hampshire. He was also a member of the coaching staff at Vanderbilt, Stanford, Colorado State, St. Bonaventure, USC and Cornell where he played basketball and graduated. In addition to that, and also prior to joining the Big 12, Jeff spent four years as deputy commissioner of the Big South where he oversaw external operations, championships and sports administration with primary focus on men's and women's basketball. Jeff's experienced in television matters, branding efforts and strategic planning as well as doing color commentary has prepared him for this new world. It is a great pleasure to welcome Jeff Jackson to the St. Louis sports scene. Jeff, welcome to St. Louis.

Jeff Jackson: Thanks, Bob, and thank you for the kind words.

Bob Wallace: Well, it's great. So tell us a little bit about your background. We were talking a little bit off before we started it. You're a native New Yorker?

Jeff Jackson: Yeah.

Bob Wallace: And grew up there and went to Cornell afterwards. Tell me about your start in your athletic endeavors.

Jeff Jackson: Well that's pretty much it. You know, grew up in New York City and was fortunate enough to be an okay football player and ended up having a chance to attend Cornell University where I met my bride to be and we're still married and she still talks to me. And kind of got into coaching there during my – played football for a year and then played basketball for a year and physically

just couldn't do it and so my last two years at Cornell, I started coaching and actually in the ivy league you have junior varsity basketball at the collegiate level and so I was able to be the head junior varsity coach and caught the bug and really enjoyed it and had a fantastic experience for 30 years coaching Division 1 basketball. And after my last tenure at the firm had expired, I decided to try administration and was very fortunate to have a chance to work in the Big South and then the work with Bob Bowsbey in the Big 12 and then over the last couple months have made the transition to and I guess to technically the commissioner in waiting for the Missouri Valley Conference which I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity and decided to get started.

Bob Wallace: Boy, it turned out you were ex-student and coaching the JV basketball team at Cornell?

Jeff Jackson: Oh yeah, exactly right. I was, I was finishing up my undergraduate degree and at the same time, I was coaching the junior varsity basketball team. That is accurate.

Bob Wallace: Wow. Who was the head coach that let you do that? That trusted you? That's quite the compliment.

Jeff Jackson: You know, it's kind of an interesting thing because again, most universities do not have ivy league programs and, you know, the ivy leagues, I shouldn't say junior varsity programs. The ivy leagues do, and so you know, you're always kind of looking around for somebody to help with that because it's not a position that's going to pay very well. So, my junior year in college, I was actually the assistant JV coach and then the JV coach got promoted to the varsity staff and they were looking for somebody to take on that role and I foolishly raised my hand and the next thing I knew, I was the coach.

Bob Wallace: Okay. Well, good. So the coaching bug, for 30 years you've done that. Do you miss it?

Jeff Jackson: No. And part of the reason I don't miss it is because of what I do now. You know, I think the whole thing about coaching is you really enjoy the interaction and the impact that you're having on young peoples' lives and you're trying to figure out a way to, you know, allow them to have a better opportunity and having the chance to go into administration, especially in the positions that I've been in, you still have a chance to continue to do that.

Bob Wallace: Do you miss the, being at the conference level that you've been at for really the last what, five or six years, the Big South and now at the Big 12 your interaction with the student athletes is a little different than when you were a basketball coach?

Jeff Jackson: It is, it is. When you're at camp, it's obviously it's day-to-day. You know, you're, you're kind of, you're seeing them and you're watching them grow, you're watching them mature, you're really in a much more intimate fashion helping them deal with their problems. You know, I think at the conference level, you're setting up ways for them to be successful but obviously not with

the same level of intimacy that you have when you're in the campus environment but it's equally as important because if you don't have those ground rails and if you don't have those guard rails and those parameters, it's hard for them to move forward. So both are extremely important, they just have different tasks.

Bob Wallace: So you're a head coach obviously and now you're going to be a commissioner. So now you're really in charge. So talk about some of the lessons that you've learned that you think that have prepared to lead a conference and be, to be the number one leader. So what are you bringing to the table and said this is what I've always wanted to do as a leader of an organization, this I what I'm going to do? So you're leadership style sort of how you are going to approach some of the big problems? How are you going to get off to a start, and all those kind of things?

Jeff Jackson: Well you know, I don't know if it's a style or just way or a way of approaching it, but, you know, I'm big on metrics, I kind of like to know the facts of the matter and I'm big on consensus, so you know I think the one thing you learn when you're dealing with ten different institutions – coming from the Big 12, we had 10 schools, now in the valley we have 10, every institution's got a different challenge. Every institution has a different agenda, a different day-to-day that they have to walk and I think the whole goal is to understand, learn and try and give each one of them the best opportunity to move forward and, you know, try and be a good listener. Hope is not a good strategy so, you know, to try and look at things in a pragmatic fashion. I do think coming from a coaching background, the intimacy that I've had on campus I think helps. I don't think it's a common approach in the conference office so I think that maybe gives me a little bit of a different way that I like to think is a positive way of looking at thing. But, you know, I think the whole thing is we're all trying to figure out ways to make sure that our student athletes are having the best possible experience they can have.

Bob Wallace: Yeah, that's very interesting how you say coming, being a person who's been on campus and going to the conference, you bring that experience where I know that the, I worked for the NFL for a number of years for clubs and we actually just say the league office, they don't understand things because they've never had to worry about it and you can, and you're bringing that experience to the table which could be a real plus, I think, for the conference.

Jeff Jackson: I agree. It's an important merger. You kind of what to know what's going on in a campus environment, you know. I have the good fortune. I'm going to know or have a sense of what the coaches are thinking, how they're looking at things. But I also understand how presidents and athletic directors are looking at it from the experience that I've had administratively and I think being able to merge all those variables will prove beneficial.

Bob Wallace: So why the MVC? Why did, what made you attracted to this particular position?

Jeff Jackson: It's a great job, you know, just like anything, it's a great opportunity to lead, it's a great opportunity to serve, it's a great opportunity to help people grow,

you know, on their campuses and create a situation where people really, you know, have a chance to feel a lot of pride for being part of the valley. You know, I'm a basketball guy. You know, I remember, you know, 15, 20, 25, 30 years ago watching March madness, you know, it's a huge deal. Great basketball schools with a tremendous legacy for success. It's pretty hard to find a reason not to want to be in Missouri Valley.

Bob Wallace: You know, it's funny when I was talking to Commissioner Elgin, we were talking about some of the legacy of the Missouri Valley Conference and some of the great players that have played here, you know, Oscar Robinson and Larry Bird and Hershey Hawkins and it is quite a legacy that the Valley has. It may be one of the best kept secrets. So you're coming in here and we're, I think we're taping this on the 100th day of the Biden administration so that seems to be the latest day, were the first 100 days. What's your first hundred days going to look like? Do you have a hundred day plan for yourself?

Jeff Jackson: I think my first 100 days is about learning our schools. You know, I think, I'm hopeful the first hundred days that I'm in my car and I'm driving up to Cedar Falls or driving into Peoria or driving over to Springfield and getting a chance to sit down and get to know our student athletes, our coaches, our athletic directors, our presidents, and get a sense of what they need on their campuses in order to make sure that they're moving in a positive direction. I think, I don't want presume anything. I kind of want to have a better chance and a better feel of just what it's like. So think my first hundred days is about educating myself, you know, whether by our staff or, which I think is outstanding, or via our campuses, our student athletes or administrators in terms of hey, what are the things that we can do to help the Missouri Valley to continue to evolve.

Bob Wallace: Well, you've been in the business too long to have a complete blank slate. Do you have any preconceived sort of thought process, things that, you know, that you look at from the outside and now coming in and say, I've got to find out about this?

Jeff Jackson: Yeah, we've got to be great at basketball. We have to, that's the front porch of our conference, that's what people are going to know is by, on a national level. We need to be great in basketball. We need to be a conference that consistently has multiple teams achieving NCAA Tournament selection which we saw last season on both the men and the women's side. You know, I don't think there's anything more important than what takes place in our regular season that leads to the chance of NCAA Tournament bids and then March Madness and, you know, what we have going on with our women's programs in Moline. Those have got to be featured events when we're talking about the Missouri Valley.

Bob Wallace: So some of the challenges that I talked to Doug about and I'd like to get your thoughts on, is one, scheduling for basketball. He thought that was really very, very important, and two, he said that you had a, that he always worried a little bit about losing coaches and he said, but Jeff has come in and taken the position that that's not a good thing for the conference but it shows that the conference, that you're going to get good coaches because it is a play

competition and then they can, if they want, they can go to an Oklahoma and make five million dollars a year.

Jeff Jackson: That's not a bad thing. You know, I think, you know, whether it's a student athlete, whether it's a coach, whether it's an administrator, you know, we're all looking to try and do things to better ourselves. We're all looking for challenges. We all want to compete against the best. You know, I think the unique thing about the Valley is you can do it from both ends of the spectrum. It's a great place to come in and if this is where you want to be for the rest of your life, you're at the highest level of the collegiate stratus and you have chance to be successful, but, you know, and it's part of Moser going to Oklahoma, I don't look at that as a negative. I look at that as a result of a tremendous, you know, the confluence of what took place administratively at Loyola, what took place with that team, what took place in regards to the presidential level and how they treated basketball and we should be building villages, you know, and I would imagine under Coach Valentine, Loyola will continue to have success. And if we're going to have the type of success at this level and we're not a high major conference, we're a very good mid-major and we've got some high major tendencies that people need to be more aware of, but we're going to lose coaches from time to time because they're going to have opportunities that either are going to be more lucrative or going to allow them to have different challenges that they strive for and I don't want to look at that as a negative because I also think we're going to attract great coaches because of what the Valley is.

So, from my perspective, yeah, we're going to lose some coaches, you know. I serve on the men's basketball oversight committee with Matt Payna, the head coach of Perdue, and Cuonzo Martin, the head coach at Missouri, they both coach in the Valley. You know what, and we've had good coaches before then, we had good coaches during their tenure and we're going to continue to have good coaches, you know, behind people like, you know, Coach Moser.

Bob Wallace: So when you, so you've been a coach, then administrator, been in the basketball world. When people found out that you had taken this job, did they, what did they say, you know, did they say Jeff, you got to do this, or what advice did they give you about coming to the Missouri Valley?

Jeff Jackson: I don't think I get many. I think one, I got a lot of congratulatory notes which I was pleased with. So far, we're working on answering all of them but that was a good thing. You know, I think everybody understands that in college basketball this is a pretty dynamic time. You know, whether you're talking about NIL, name in which in likeness, whether you're talking about the new transfer rules, whether we're talking about gender equity, I think there's a lot of moving pieces right now so I think everybody understands that whatever you're doing in this field, you kind of need to take a breath, you need to get a sense of what the landscape is and be very, you know, prudent in your deliberation about what you're going to do, how and why.

Bob Wallace: You hit three topics that I wanted to ask you about. I'm going to start with the last one that you started with, which is gender equity. And obviously, we saw

during the men's and women's basketball, the difference in the way the NCAA treated the women and treated the men. And obviously I think everybody was embarrassed by that. The Missouri Valley, as you said, the front porch of your conference, is basketball and the front porch is probably men's basketball but the women's basketball program has been very successful. How do you balance those, the two, where men is the money maker but you really want to give the women a good opportunity and a good experience as well.

Jeff Jackson: Our women's basketball programs were extremely successful this year with multiple bids. That's where you want to be. I think the most important thing is that we're equitable, that we're fair. You know, that we're making sure, you know, through a consistent auditing process, that we're not letting anything slip through the cracks. You know, the conversations that I've had with our staff, I think we're in a really good place in ensuring that our women's basketball teams are having an equal experience to our men's basketball team in regards to what they experience, what they go through, what they have a chance to partake of as basketball players in the Missouri Valley.

Bob Wallace: Yeah, we're talking about --

Jeff Jackson: I don't want to just limit this conversation to basketball because, again, even in the NCAAA, I think that conversation has been limited to basketball. But, again, we want to make sure that exists whether we're talking about baseball and softball, whether we're talking about track, whether we're talking about soccer, it is extremely important that everybody feels that they're being treated fairly and equitably and that decisions aren't being made that in any way change shape or penalize somebody simply based on their gender.

Bob Wallace: Right. I mean, and, you mentioned a bunch of the other sports. The MVC is, has good programs in what other sports? I mean basketball --

Jeff Jackson: -- You know, you look at our baseball, you look at our volleyball, you look at our track and field, we're pretty fortunate. We've got a deep bench in terms of being someplace that if you're a student athlete regardless of what you play, what sport you participate in, we've got some schools that you can come and have a tremendous experience at.

Bob Wallace: We hear that. It seems like it's the wild west in terms of the transfer rules. Now, talk about transferring and this new system, it seems like, I guess yesterday or a couple days ago they passed a new rule that you can transfer once without sitting out?

Jeff Jackson: Yeah. It's not so much a passing of a new rule. Yesterday, there was something that they've been talking about for a while, but it feels a little bit like the wild, wild west but I think we got, have that. It stands a little bit for confluence of issues this year. One, we, the NCAA granted student athletes an extra year, basically this year doesn't count because of the pandemic. So anybody who was a junior this year is a junior next year. We have maybe in some ways equalled the playing field. In other words, in the sports basketball, football, hockey, we are now allowing those student athletes to transfer one

time within their academic career without having to deal with what we call a year of residence, or sit out a year. Well, that's something we've been doing in all other sports. I think all we've done is got to a point where we're making it fair for student athletes in their decision-making process about their lives while they're student athletes. And so we're seeing maybe a little bit more transferring than we normally would. We still have the graduate transfer rule which means that if you finish up your degree, you can go someplace else and play immediately. You don't have to go through that year of residency. Again we got people getting that extra year. So we've got a lot of different phases making this year a little bit more unique. I think it'll tamp down over time but I also think this is what we're going to see for a while. We're going to see, you know, kids looking at it and saying, hey I'm not getting enough playing time, I'm not happy, I'm going to try something different.

I'm a little concerned about it because I think there's a place, Bob, where you want to battle through adversity. You know, I hate the concept and the idea that the first time something goes awry, a student athlete feels like well it's going to be greener, you know, on the other side, and what we know as mature adults is that's not the case. You know, there's really not going to be that much of a variance between how you're treated in one basketball program and how you're treated in another. So I think, you know, at the start we're going to have a lot of movement but I think over time, water will find its level and this process will calm down and people will work through it in maybe a more pragmatic fashion.

Bob Wallace: So has, have you noticed, is there sort of a numbers game now going on with the extra year and, you know, freshmen coming in and, or is it kind of balancing out?

Jeff Jackson: Well, if you, in your program, if you have a senior that wants to return, you can go beyond the scholarship limit of 13 on the men's side or 15 on the women's side to retain that senior but that's the only time that you can go beyond that number. So you're not going to see other for this upcoming season. You may see a few rosters that have one to two extra players but a lot of guys are going to choose to move on. Some are going to stay. You're probably going to see more student athletes stay at the mid-major level than you're going to see at the high major level because at the high major level you've got a little bit more for professional influence in terms of opportunity where at the mid-major level there may be a professional opportunity, but it's simply not going to be as lucrative. So, for the first year or two, the extra year so to speak, will probably benefit a conference, like in Missouri Valley, more than a conference like the Big 12.

Bob Wallace: So you, you're now moving from one of the power fives to a mid-major and I want to talk a little about the NIL and what a, how do you see that playing in those two kind of spaces. Uh, but just an overview, moving from the power five where the economy to this next level group. What do you see some of the challenges are or some of the differences that you have other than money?

Jeff Jackson: Well, I think the biggest difference is obvious, it's money. There's simply more resources in the A-5 conferences than you have in the other conferences. And that's never going to change. NIL is probably going to have a little bit of a bigger impact than the A-5 than at a conference level of ours but that doesn't mean it's not going to come in play. And I think everybody has to be openminded about what's going to take place here because it is coming and I think we need to embrace it when it does come. Now, I think the problem is, is right now it is so ambiguous, we don't really know what it's going to be. We don't know what form it's going to take, you know. Between what we're seeing when it comes to different legislation being proposed by different states, the fact that we're still waiting to see how the Supreme Court looks at the Alston case because we think that could have an impact. We're still trying to figure out just how to administer it. I think we're probably still a year away, not in terms of its implementation but in terms of just figuring out how to manage it and how it's going to impact our programs at all levels of division one.

Bob Wallace: Yeah, I listened to the oral argument for the Alston cases, very interesting for listening to. Alston case was brought against the NCAA so that students could get benefits, educational benefits and the NCAA took a position that that would impact the amateurism of the sport. I think the commentators were basically saying the Supreme Court seemed to come down on the side of Alston and not the NCAA and I kept telling people that we can never guess what the Supreme Court's going to do based upon the questions that they asked. They are, they play the devil's advocate.

But what do you see about paying college athletes and the amateurs', you know, model that we've been using for decades. Uh, and I don't see the change.

Jeff Jackson: Well, you know, to be clear, name, image and likeness is not about paying college athletes, okay. Name, image and likeness is about college athletes having the ability outside the arena of the college game outside of recruiting to make money off their name, their image and their likeness. And I think it's important that that is separated because we are not looking to take this into a professional model where we're paying people for the talents that they provide in the arena or on the field or on the court. So, you know, that's important. Personally, we do compensate our college athletes. I think one of the things that has been lost in this conversation is somehow we've gotten to the point that a college education is not worth anything. And I think we're sometimes overly remiss and simply not understanding the value of the student athlete having a chance to go to college for free, especially when we know the impact, especially from a longevity vantage point, of a college degree financially on any person who has the chance to go through that process. I think we're missing the importance of that and maybe underselling how that is.

And I also think we've got to be careful that when we're talking about NIL that whatever we come up with as a plan isn't just pointed towards the aberrational athlete, okay. Look, Zion Williamson, I'm coming from a conference where we had Cade Cunningham coming here and he's probably

going to be the number one pick in the draft in a few weeks. Those guys are different. Those guys are unicorns, okay. I think we've got to be mindful that 90% to 95% of the people we're talking about, their market is a chance to go to college for free and nothing more and nothing less.

Bob Wallace: I've heard the argument that a women's tennis player from the Missouri Valley may have a better chance to market her name, image and likeness as opposed to a quarterback at campus.

Jeff Jackson: I think that's plausible, especially if that woman athlete has a TikTok following as an influencer, has the ability now to run a camp because she's from a community where she's well-known and people want to learn how to play tennis. I think there's a lot of ways, again, but the things that we're talking about there don't impact winning and losing games and don't impact the recruiting process and I think that's what we're trying to, as much as we can from our world, that's where we're trying to create some separation.

Bob Wallace: Well it'll be an interesting – I mean, you know, we touched upon three of those issues and I think you'll, it's not like you're going to come in and not have to deal with those over the next few years. You know, I think the NCAA has taken, you know, sort of a, I call it going into four corners on this NIL. I think they'll have to deal with it quicker than they are other than --

Jeff Jackson: You know I'm not sure, Bob, I would agree with the four corners. I think what they're doing is they're waiting to see what the Supreme Court does with the Austin case because I think we all know that the Supreme Court did not take the Austin case simply to let the Ninth District know that they did a good job. They took it for a reason. They're going to want to make a point, whatever that point is. So I think if you feel like the NCAAA in this case, not that we haven't at times made mistakes, but I think in this case whatever delay is taking place is because there is some anxiety to see where the Supreme Court comes out in regards to the Austin decision.

Bob Wallace: Yeah. If, if, I can be critical of the NCAAA, but I can be even more critical of Congress and I, and I would be very nervous if I was the NCAAA or college athletics that I was going to let Congressional, the Congress come up with a plan for our sport. I think you guys need to get out in front of that before they something that doesn't work.

Jeff Jackson: Well, we need to have help here because, and you're a lawyer so you know, we need preemption. We can't have 30 to 32 different legislative policies on NIL. We need, in this case we do need their help because we need a national concept. We need a national way of doing this. Um, and so I'm hopeful that they do look at it from that vantage point and we also, as you know, we need some safe harbor. We, we need that antitrust protection. So there are things that we need here or at least are hopeful of receiving in order to make sure that we can operate in a fashion that we can still recognize.

Bob Wallace: Well, I would push back a little bit and say, what they're basically saying is yeah, we'll help you but you need to acknowledge that the system that you have and just trying to put a Band-Aid over this big sore is not going to work.

We want a program that is going to give the college athlete more flexibility than they currently have and they seem to not be getting that kind of cooperation from the higher ups --

Jeff Jackson: You're a hundred percent right, it needs to evolve but I do think you're seeing that flexibility and mobility a little bit because you spoke about it at the beginning of your show with the transfer portal. You know, look, you're right. There's a lot of kids in there. There's a lot of things going on but that is part of the mobility and the flexibility that you are granting these student athletes and, you know, we're going to have to live with those decisions. Some of those decisions are going to be very good decisions. Some of those decisions are going to be very bad decisions.

Bob Wallace: Right. It'll be, it's something that I think those of us who are sports lawyers and those of you who are sports executives, will have to follow and stay on top of because it's --

Jeff Jackson: Well if anybody wants to tell you they know, they have an answer, or they know where this is heading, they're being disingenuous. Nobody has an answer and nobody right now knows exactly where this is headed.

Bob Wallace: Right. I always say there's 20 smart people that have an interest in this and too many people making some money off of this, that they really need to come together and say okay, we're not trying to solve a problem for the system that we have, we're trying to come up with a system to deal with the changes in our game, I mean, you know, television, salaries, mobility, all those things are so much different than they were in even the 1980s.

Jeff Jackson: Sure, sure. I think one of the constants that gets lost either is look, we've got to be mindful of Title 9, you know, we were talking about gender equity at the beginning of this, you know. Whatever we do, we don't want to in any way move backwards in regards to the things that we have done, you know, to try and achieve gender equity when it comes to the ability to participate in sports and so you, there's a lot of things in play here because you know as well as I do, Bob, a lot of the money that comes in whether it's from a TV contract, whether it's from a sponsorship or things of that nature, you know, it helps support our Olympic sports which include a lot of the money that goes into Title 9.

Bob Wallace: Right, right. No, no, I'm not saying that it's an easy problem that you guys --

Jeff Jackson: No.

Bob Wallace: -- Would have to deal with. It's not easy, but it's done that as you said, will evolve. So talk a little bit about you're coming to St. Louis and you're moving into town and look around and, you know, one of the things that have been very popular here in St. Louis is the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament. And it's been here for what, 25 years or so. Talk about how you're looking at that. Do you have any thoughts about how to make it better, leave it alone, why St. Louis, in your mind do you think St. Louis is a place that will continue to host it during your tenure?

Jeff Jackson: I would hope so. I, I think St. Louis is fantastic. I think it's the right place. I think it's a, there's a very obvious motive. We simply want to get more people in the building. We want more people to understand how good Missouri Valley basketball is and we're going to work very hard within the community and within the region and within our campus communities to bring more people for this event to get more people to understand how much of a great even it is. To get more community involvement, that is something that is going to be at the top of our chart in terms of the things that we want to get accomplished and get accomplished very quickly.

Bob Wallace: So out of the pandemic, I mean you're at the Big 12 so it had the same effect, what kind of effect did that have on college athletics in this past two years?

Jeff Jackson: I think it was huge. I, I think, you know, the financial impact, you know, colleges are for the most part nonprofits. You know, so they're budgets are year to year, especially on the athletic side. So you go a year and if your budget is \$17 million dollars and all of a sudden you can only cover eight or nine of it, that's a huge impact. We've seen it in furloughs, we've seen it in layoffs, we've seen it in umpteen different ways that have had a negative impact and it's been a challenge. You know, no matter how big or how small a program is, you've had to deal with the virus. Even people would be mind-boggled in terms of how much money we spent on testing this year. The things that we've had to do in order to make sure that we're keeping our student athletes safe, whether it's been testing, whether it's been minimizing attendance so that we have enough social distancing in play. It's been an incredible challenge for everybody and it's been an incredible learning opportunity and I think there will be things that we take from this that we'll continue to use moving forward because, as we all know, necessity is the mother of invention and we all became extremely creative --

Bob Wallace: Right, I was going to ask that question.

Jeff Jackson: -- The last 12 or 14 months.

Bob Wallace: What have you learned? What are some of the things that we were forced to do during the pandemic that you think will continue going forward?

Jeff Jackson: You know, it'll be, I think one of the things, and I think your, your audience would appreciate it, is I think we're looking at recruiting differently. You know, we have found an ability to in some ways become more intimate with the student athletes that we are courting through Zoom. You know, it's one thing to go to a campus for a day and pop in and say hi and all those type of things, but, you know, Zoom is perpetual, you know, and so are we able to in some ways forge stronger and more proficient relationships with our student athletes as coaches and administrators and support personnel using Zoom, that means we don't have to travel as much. That means that our coaches don't have to spend as much time away from their student athletes or in some cases, away from their families. So that would be one, you know, thing that comes immediately to my mind that we're probably going to try and decipher and say, hey, are there things in that genre that we want to keep that we want to maintain because we see some positive things moving forward.

Bob Wallace: Good, yeah. Let me ask you. When you talk about your student athletes and you've been coach and you've been around them on campuses, what do you hear from them that their, that's on the top of their minds about college athletics?

Jeff Jackson: You know, it's kind of interesting because the most important thing that we heard from them in the conversations we had, and I have to rely on what we learned in the Big 12 is, they want to compete, they want to do it in a safe way. I think they understand that the landscape has changed. Ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, you know, student athletes for lack of a better term, were much more subservant. Right now, I think they understand that they have the opportunity to really be heard, to really have an impact on how their experiences are locally and nationally. And they're ready to take advantage of that. And that is something that, at least from our office, we're going to embrace because the reason we do this is for them. And so if we're provided an opportunity to help them grow, to help nurture them, to help them figure out how to make decisions, this is just another lab that they have an opportunity to partake in and it's important that we do everything we can to guide them properly.

Bob Wallace: So you would argue that social media and the ability to communicate and social justice are good things for a student athlete as they grow?

Jeff Jackson: I think anything that provides an opportunity for an experience to learn and grow is what I always thought the whole collegiate experience was supposed to be about.

Bob Wallace: I agree with you, Jeff. I always say, you know, when they tell me that this a bunch of remote learning and tutors and, you know, kids are on the road, you know, on a Tuesday through Thursday playing basketball and they're not in class, and they say well they have tutors, and I say, you know, I don't, I rarely remember what I learned in the classroom from college but I do remember the interactions that I had with my fellow students and the professors and just you know, the thought processes that we had in class discussing things, instead of just, you know, not.

Jeff Jackson: Yeah, I'm probably with you, Bob. I can't remember much of stats 101.

Bob Wallace: Right.

Jeff Jackson: Yeah, but you know what, I remember how to communicate. I remember how to comport myself. I remember how to thank. I remember how to decipher and that's what you learn in college.

Bob Wallace: Well I want to thank you. I want to end this in a little bit with you and when Doug congratulated you and said you been looking at the briefing papers and all that? What did he leave on the table for you to clean up?

Jeff Jackson: Very little, very little. That's what made it a great job, you know, is that Doug has just been fantastic, you know, and again, we're blessed. He's done a terrific job. The staff is fantastic. They're so professional. They care about

the student athletes, they care about the Missouri Valley, it's, I'm just really fortunate in terms of being able to follow what Doug has been able to do and what he has left behind.

Bob Wallace: So in five years, what are you going to say that Jeff Jackson has done to make the Missouri Valley a better conference?

Jeff Jackson: I hope in five years, our student athletes are talking about the wonderful experience that they had in participating in Missouri Valley championships. I'm hoping we'll see a larger footprint on the national stage and people recognizing and talking about the Valley and I'm hoping that we're walking into March Madness and you're trying to get in late and you can't find a seat.

Bob Wallace: Well I'm on the commissioner now. So as, and in college athletics in general in the next ten years, what changes do you see?

Jeff Jackson: I think NIL will be huge. I think maybe the most important thing is that the shift in the Paradyme between the student athletes and coaches and administrators. It's much more if an equal footing and the coaches and the administrations and the villages that are going to be successful are going to be the ones who not only understand and accept that, but they're going to be the ones who embrace that.

Bob Wallace: Yeah. Well, Jeff, I want to one, welcome you to St. Louis. For our audience, Jeff is a native New Yorker, which I am, and he's from Jamaica, New York which is where I am from and he went to an ivy league school although we don't consider Cornell that.

Jeff Jackson: No, no it's the bastard of the ivy league. We all talk about it. You know enough to know that. You know, I'll share this with you and hopefully it won't take you too long, but, you know, I always tell people, you know, I went to a really good state school and what people don't realize is Cornell is a land grant institution --

Bob Wallace: Right.

Jeff Jackson: -- And four the colleges on their campus actually belong to New York State. And then there's three schools that applied it and, you know, my wife and my kids probably remind me, but my wife is also a Cornell grad but she went private. I went to the school of industrial labor relations which is public.

Bob Wallace: Okay.

Jeff Jackson: So, people knowing that who went Cornell they always kind of, sometimes are taken back when I said, hey I went to a really good state school, you know, and, and, you know, so I get a chance to explain to them the theory of land grant institutions.

Bob Wallace: It's a beautiful campus. What brought you from the City of New York up to Cornell, up to Ithaca.

Jeff Jackson: In all candor, because the financial aid package was better than the financial aid packages that I was getting for scholarships. Unfortunately, we weren't very well off and somebody explained to me that I could get an ivy league degree for free and I thought that was a pretty good deal.

Bob Wallace: Yeah that, that's a pretty good deal. And you've made the best of it so congratulations on becoming the tenth commissioner, I believe it is, and the MVC. Welcome to St. Louis. I hope we get a chance to break some bread. You said you found some good places to eat and I look forward to meeting you in person and having a lunch with you or something like that, so. Welcome to St. Louis. Thank you for your taking the time, I really appreciate that. And good luck.

Jeff Jackson: And thank you. And same to you and please, stay safe.

Bob Wallace: Stay safe. Well, thank you uh, fans, people listening to this. Hope you enjoyed listening to our incoming commissioner, Jeff Jackson, and got a sense of what goes on After the Buzzer. If you enjoyed our conversation or any of our other podcasts, you can write your feedback by going to Apple Podcasts and going to the rating and review section. If you listen on Stitcher.com and rate is there. If there is a topic you would like to hear us discuss, let us know that too. Thank you for listening. Thanks, Jeff.

Jeff Jackson: Thanks, Bob, really appreciate it.

Bob Wallace: Thank you, good luck to you.