



After the Buzzer

Transcript: Part 1: Missouri Valley Conference Commissioner Doug Elgin

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Bob Wallace:

Welcome to After the Buzzer, our podcast where we talk to sports leaders about what keeps them busy during the everchanging and fastmoving 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. And again we have a great guest, who has had an unbelievable career in college athletics. For the past 33 years he has led the Missouri Valley Conference as its Commissioner, and that person is Doug Elgin. Doug is the ninth Commissioner of the MVC, having been selected to lead the Conference in 1988. In the intervening years Doug and his veteran staff have been a catalyst in turning the Missouri Valley Conference to prominence in college athletics. In Chicago Loyola's recent runs through the Final Four and this year's Elite Eight are prime examples of the league's success. Doug has seen addition and subtraction during his tenure. In 1992 the MVC added the women's programs into its programs, and despite the losses of Wichita State and Creighton, added the previously-mentioned Chicago Loyola and Valparaiso to its ranks. Prior to joining the MVC, Doug has worked for four institutions and in two conference offices. One of those institutions was Lafayette College in Pennsylvania, his alma mater, where he was a standout college football player. His 33 years at the MVC have been truly remarkable. He has made St. Louis the host of the popular MVC basketball tournament and a frequent stop on the NCAA basketball trail, both women's and men's basketball. In addition to his success in St. Louis through college hoops, Doug has been a member of the NCAA MIT Tournament Committee, the NCAA Administrative Cabinet, the NCAA Men's Basketball Oversight Committee and the NABC Ad Hoc Committee on the NCAA Selection, Seeding and Bracketing. He has also served a term on the NCAA Men's Basketball Committee and had a hand in landing the 2005 Final Four for St. Louis. And then led the community's efforts to making the Final Four one of the best, the best I can remember, and I have been to every one since 1991 until the canceled one of last year and a reduced crowd one of this year. Commissioner Elgin recently announced his retirement, leaving his post at the end of June. And what an opportune time this is to speak to him about his career and college athletics in general. Doug, welcome to After the Buzzer.

Doug Elgin: Thank you, Bob. Always good to see you and to be with you.

Bob Wallace: Good. So tell me a little bit, you know, and we joke with each other about our college football careers a lot. I think you were a, what were you – a fullback at Lafayette?

Doug Elgin: I was a tailback.

Bob Wallace: Tailback.

Doug Elgin: Tailback. And you were a slamming running back at Yale; right?

Bob Wallace: Haha. Yeah, yeah. I think we, you probably played a lot more than I. I had a son who played at Yale. He was a lot better than me. As my coach, used to say all the time. Every time Grant made a catch at Yale, he'd say, "His dad played for me. He's a lot better than his dad." Haha

Doug Elgin: Haha

Bob Wallace: But Doug, you also played for a guy I work with, Harry Gambol, who was, was he that, was he your head coach?

Doug Elgin: He was. He actually came to my high school and recruited in the area that I lived in. I came from a small town in western Maryland about an hour west of Baltimore, Washington. And that to me was a great opportunity. I was the first of my family to go away to college. Youngest of four. And just had the opportunity to play a sport in college. It was really pretty special.

Bob Wallace: Yeah. What made you choose Lafayette?

Doug Elgin: Really, my high school coach knew Harry Gambol. They had coached in the vicinity in New Jersey, and, I had never heard of Lafayette quite honestly. Growing up I wanted to go to Maryland but I wasn't good enough to play there, so. It was a good fit for me, a good academic school and really gave me an opportunity to grow as a young man and as an athlete and in my academics.

Bob Wallace: Yeah. I always say, when I was a backup running back at Yale, and was a backup running back in college at an ivy league, you know that your career is not going to be as a player going forward. What made you decide that you wanted to make athletics your career?

Doug Elgin: Well, when I got out of college I took a job, the only job offer I had was at Prudential Insurance, their corporate headquarters in Newark, New Jersey. I hated it from day one, and I left after a year to coach high school football and teach at a New Milford, Connecticut high school. I did that for a year, not quite an entire year. I was accepted into the Ohio Youth Sports Administration Program, which was the first of its kind in the country, and that really gave me an opportunity to get into the business. First, with an internship at a small college in Maryland, and then I got a full-time job at Miami Dade Community College South in Miami. And that led me to a

couple of other opportunities. I think the big break in my athletics career came when I went to the University of Virginia in 1980. I left Lafayette, my alma mater, where I was Sports Information Director of Media Relations, went to Virginia and that was the era of Ralph Sampson.

Bob Wallace:

Wow.

Doug Elgin:

Yeah. In my three years there he was the national player of the year three years in a row. Michael Jordan was at North Carolina. And that really put me in the, really, the center of the universe, so to speak, in college basketball.

Bob Wallace:

So it's interesting. In the beginning of your career you talk about being at one place and another place. As you look at your career, and I'm sure you get a lot of inquiries from young people saying, I want to be in sports. What kind of advice do you give them when, I mean it seems like you got to be willing to go anywhere.

Doug Elgin:

Well, you do. You have to be willing to, you have to be mobile, as they say in the business. But you really have to take advantage of every opportunity to get experience. I didn't have any administrative experience as a collegiate, as a student. The athletics was certainly important but for young people that are at Mizzou or other places, Maryvale, that come to see me just for advice. I say, get involved in athletics as a volunteer while you're in college and that really opens doors for you. Because you'll find that it's, it can be who you know, and you got to have a good work ethic. You got to be passionate about it. Those who find sports as their passion and get into the business and work hard at it usually do advance, and certainly I had a couple of really great opportunities along the way early in my career.

Bob Wallace:

So who would you say was Doug Elgin's mentor? Who's your mentor in this business?

Doug Elgin:

I had a couple. Gene Corrigan was the Athletics Director at Virginia and he hired me. He later became the Athletics Director at Notre Dame, and following that the ACC Commissioner. My first job at a conference office was in Tampa with the Sundial Conference, different set of schools than they have now. Vic Lubis was the commissioner of that league, and he was a former Duke basketball coach. So that really gave me access to not only important mentors, but to get to know people in the business in high places. Dave Gabitz, Tom Jernstetz, everybody that was involved in college basketball were connected to my mentors and that really gave me an opportunity to grow and to learn from the people that I worked for.

Bob Wallace:

So, 33 years as the Commissioner of the MVC. Are you the longest-standing Commissioner in college sports?

Doug Elgin:

Right now I am. Yeah. For another two months. I'm the longest-tenured at a multisport conference. One asterisk there, Patty Viverito who has 38 years.

Bob Wallace: Wow.

Doug Elgin: What she's doing, she was with the Gateway Conference which merged into the Missouri Valley. So she is really the longest-serving CCA Commissioner in a single sport league with the football. And you know, she's been a rock here. The continuity of staff, here we've got four people who have worked 30 years or more working together on a 14-person staff. That's really been the key to our success here is the continuity of staff, the dedication, the commitment that they have made to their jobs and to staying with the Missouri Valley.

Bob Wallace: Yeah, that must mean that you're a good guy to work for. Or work with. You'll term it as "work with" but I'm sure that the fact that you can keep a staff that for over 30 years says something about your leadership style. So tell me, what does a Commissioner do and what is your leadership style, Doug?

Doug Elgin: Well I think I don't view anyone in this office as working for me. They work for themselves and they work for the students. And that shows. The dedication is unbelievable and I know you probably see this at your law firm and in other industries, but, you know, they sacrifice a lot of weekends, they're away on Thanksgiving a lot, they work over Christmas holiday. There's no time off, so to speak. Particularly in a pandemic year like we're going through. But I just have great admiration and respect for the people that work here and for those on our campuses. We've had in my time great campus leadership here. The presidents and the athletic administrators and the key for their staffs is the coaches that they hire. And that's why we've been nationally competitive in virtually every team sport, are the great coaches that we've had come through our doors.

Bob Wallace: Yeah. You just lost a really good one, going to Oklahoma from your conference. I was talking to your lawyer during the past week about Loyola Chicago and I said, this guy's a really good coach. You could tell the way they were, they played in the tournament, how well-coached they were.

Doug Elgin: That's Porter Mosure, who was mentored by Rick Mageris at St. Louis U, after he had been fired at Illinois State he came here to work on Rick's staff, and that really gave him great insight, great experience with great learning experience for Porter Mosure to work under Rick Mageris here in St. Louis. And when we lost Wichita State, I'm sorry, when we had turnover and we were looking for a school to add, that really attracted my attention to Loyola was the Porter Mosure connection. So. They were in the Final four, four years after.

Bob Wallace: Yeah. It's been great. So, I mean, I'm not going to quite let you off the hook as easy as the people there. What's your leadership style? How does Doug Elgin get these people that have been around for 30 years to march in the same direction? What's your style in doing that?

Doug Elgin: I think I'm personable. I think my strengths include the fact that I'm so disoriented and I deal with our membership. Every question is important

to answer. And I think, I won't say that I run a tight ship here. I think we have freedoms here that you don't have on campuses. Nobody has to be in the office at 8:00 in the morning. And they work late at night. They work weekends. So that license, that freedom is important to keep people here. But I do think we've always had a culture here that we're a team. We have several leaders here, not just me. Patty Vivrito is a Commissioner for the football leagues and Joy Valley Football Conference and the football league. And other senior staffers have stepped up in the areas that they oversee, really in a big-time way.

Bob Wallace: Do you remember, Doug, that I was the sideline reporter for the Gateway football conference? And, just like every other talent, I only did it for a year because I didn't get enough face time on TV. Haha

Doug Elgin: You're still a legend, Bob.

Bob Wallace: What is the role? As a Commissioner, you deal with a lot of different constituents and you've got your president, you've got athletic directors, you probably got the most challenging in the coaches because coaches are always very challenging. You got your student athletes. So, what does Doug Elgin think is the most important thing that he does as a Commissioner of the Missouri Valley Conference?

Doug Elgin: Well I think that's even changed over time as the industry has become more complex. You know, I think it's just managing people as much as anything. And making sure that all of our objectives are reached. We try to accomplish those objectives every year and we try to set the bar high for ways that we can improve, and I think if you look at our men's basketball tournament, for example. When we brought it here we were on pretty shaky legs with that event, March Madness. We brought it to the old Kiel Auditorium. And I think my role is just doing what I can do to steer the ship so to speak. And others on it are pulling hard and, I know I'm being very vague and very broad with what I'm answering here, but, the modern Commissioner has a different approach to the overall array of responsibilities that I had coming in here. It was much less complex. We've evolved with social media and with our television platforms in ways that you couldn't have predicted back in the late 1980s. So, again, I think, I give a lot of credit to staff because it's deserved. And that's really what has made this conference office operation work is that we got continuity, everybody's focused and we real hard together as a team.

Bob Wallace: It seems like it was yesterday, but it might have been five, six, seven years ago where all the conferences were expanding and losing things. Talk about, you know, and it kind of goes into your last comment about it's a changing responsibilities from when you first started. All of this expansion and additions of teams and conferences emerging, talk about the challenges that presented through the Missouri Valley Conference, which is a mid-major conference. It's not really the Big 10 or the Big 12. Talk about those challenges a little bit.

Doug Elgin: Well I think in here nobody really focused on conference realignment; it was almost below the radar until Penn State went to the Big 10. An independent school, a football power in the east, went to the Big 10 in the early 1990s. And then people started to pay attention. They began to understand the power of media contracts, the revenues that are possible. And that's when the 1990s were really kind of wild and crazy. For us, I've been here 30+ years. We've had three institutions leave our membership. University of Tulsa left in 1996, Creighton left in 2013, and Wichita State left in 2017. And we've added five institutions that are still members of our conference over that time. And what you notice is it's not very often that anything but your best members leave. So, that's a painful part of the overall responsibility of a conference Commissioner. When you lose a member institution that's been important to you, you usually have to turn and go below and take someone from another conference, and that puts a strain on relationships as you can well imagine. We've taken Southwest Missouri State during my years here. Northern Iowa, Evansville, Loyola Chicago and Valparaiso, and that's half of our current membership. Wasn't here when I started as a Commissioner back in 1988. But, it's invigorating when you add new members that are fit. That eventually lays the bar for the rest of the membership and not only competitively but academically and with the overall leadership aspect of what a new institution brings to us in the people that work with athletics.

Bob Wallace: So, Missouri Valley is known primarily as a basketball conference, but when you're attracting the Valparaiso, the Chicago Loyolas, they obviously have to be a fit in some of your other sports. Talk about some of your other sports, Doug, and what role they played 1) in attracting them and 2) in the overall Missouri Valley portfolio.

Doug Elgin: Well I think we're known as a basketball conference and historically we're the second oldest conference in the country behind only the Big 10. We were founded in 1907. Dr. James Naismith (you probably know that name, Bob). He was the inventor of the game of basketball and used the idea at Kansas. And so, basketball has been our key sport through the years. We had football as a conference, long story. It went away. It reformed through the Gateway Conference with some of our institutions. And when you look at our portfolio of sports, team sports and individual sports, we play at very high levels in arguably every team sport. Our volleyball is arguably as strong as our men's and women's basketball. Certainly our baseball through the years has been very, very successful. Men's soccer, softball, all of those sports have had their moments where they had teams advance, even in the NCAA postseason. So, I think it's pretty similar across the board in our league in terms of the quality of coaches that we have, the quality of student athletes. We've got All Americans. And you look at our hall of fame. We started a hall of fame in the late 1990s. Joe Mitch was the guy who brought that to us. He was part of our staff for a long, long time, and that was his idea. That coincided with his tenure year in 2007, and we brought back the Oscar Robinsons and the Larry Birds and some of the great players of our past in that year for a function that we had downtown. A live TV event, and you just have to be very proud of the

tradition and the overall sports umbrella that we have here. It's very, very strong.

Bob Wallace: So, you just mentioned, for those that are listening, you know, Oscar Robinson is a Missouri Valley Conference player. Wright, wasn't he a Cincinnati big party conference at one point?

Doug Elgin: Early '60s. I'm looking at a poster over here. We had Wes Unsehl.

Bob Wallace: Larry Bird, of course.

Doug Elgin: Right. West Unsehl, Xavier McDaniel. We had all kinds of great.

Bob Wallace: Hershey Hawkins?

Doug Elgin: Percy Hawkins. Doug Collins. Just a ton of great athletes who would come through our door in basketball. We had something like eight of the top 50 all-time NBA players that were Missouri Valley products.

Bob Wallace: Wow, that's great. So, you brought the Missouri Valley tournament. You said that you were on maybe the last legs when you brought the conference tournament here to St. Louis. Why did you make that decision? And your office is located here in St. Louis. Why St. Louis?

Doug Elgin: Well that's part of it. Our offices are here, and I had been in a conference where I would literally move to our conference city, one of our campuses, each year, to learn the men's basketball tournament wherever the highest bid. I was in Wichita, no I'm sorry not Wichita. I was in Charlotte. I was in Tampa. I was in Mobile, Alabama, western Kentucky and Bowling Green. Different years I served in that role in the Sun Dial Conference, and it was very difficult to recreate a quality tournament with all the details that you need to provide the best possible fan and student athlete experience. So we brought it here I think because more importantly than anything else, we wanted to take away the advantage that the home court gave the host team. And I can remember in 1990 we were at Illinois State. Southern Illinois had to play Illinois State in their home arena. It was packed, 11,000 fans. It was crazy and wild. Rich Harren, the late, great Rich Harren, was the coach at Southern Illinois. And Southern Illinois lost in the last minute on a play. I won't mention the play, but it was one that could have gone either way. And that home court was just too important to give an advantage to the host team. So we brought it here and we had an organization called Civic Entrepreneurs Organization, or CEO, that basically was a combination and a merging of small businesses who work together on projects in the community and bringing events to St. Louis. I felt that St. Louis was sort of the hub of the wheel in our conference. We had a five-state footprint at the time. Basically the same overall geography that the Cardinals Nation has in terms of bringing fans to St. Louis. Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Kansas were five states where we had member institutions. And it was just really important for us to bring it to a central location, where our staff could work on it all year round. And it has become over time, it's the second longest neutral site tournament in the

country for a conference. The Big East has been at the Madison Square Garden since the late 1970s and we are the second longest at a mutual site over that period of time.

Bob Wallace: Wow, that's unbelievable. But tell me, how has the pandemic affected the MVC?

Doug Elgin: Wow. It's rocked the entire industry, quite honestly. From an economic standpoint we saw a 68% reduction in our revenues last year. We were the last, we were one of the last events in college basketball to play a year ago when the pandemic shut down American sports basically. We knew that when the second NBA player tested positive and they stopped the NBA season, that March Madness was at risk and certainly all the postseason events were as well. We had to cancel our women's basketball tournament the week after our men's basketball tournament was completed here in St. Louis. We were in Moline, Illinois for our women's tournament and we had to cancel that. It's been a struggle. It's been a major burden for many people, including student athletes and their families. Most important, those are the ones that have taken the most of the burden in the way they've had to reengineer their lives and their sports careers. Our staff I think did a wonderful job with the COVID testing protocols and doing everything they could to provide guidance to keep our team safe and we were the only conference in the country to play all of our men's basketball games, conference men's basketball games. All 90 games were played. Some were postponed but we rescheduled them. We played 86 of our 90 women's basketball games, and we played both of our tournaments with the exception of one men's team which disqualified to continue to play here in St. Louis. So, I'm proud of what our staff has done certainly to lead the way and that guidance that we've provided to our students.

Bob Wallace: What did you do that you had so much success? What, was your protocol something that other conferences didn't do? Do you know?

Doug Elgin: Well I don't know about that, but certainly the way in which we adjusted our schedule, to be able to reschedule games when series were postponed. What we did, we used to have a kind of a helter-skelter approach to our schedule where a team would go on the road and back home and on the road again and back home, and they would have nine trips. You have nine opponents in the league. You have nine road trips. And you play each of those teams at home nine times. What we did is we used a sequence in our games and we would go on the road to play two consecutive games at one opponent, the same opponent. In fact, it cut our travel in half basically. And that isn't preferred because you're playing Saturday night at Loyola Chicago and then Sunday night at Loyola Chicago if you're Drake. But it's back-to-back games. You have less recovery time between games. You have less ability to adjust your strategies to meet that opponent 24 hours later. And the coaches bought into that. They knew it wouldn't be to their advantage in a lot of ways but it mitigated risk; it gave them a greater opportunity to complete the schedule. You know I think our testing, we follow the CDC guidelines, the NCAA guidance and past protocols, and most importantly, there is a discipline among our, not only our student

athletes and our coaches but all of those that dealt on a daily basis with the players and the coaches. Trainers, student managers, people that work in the arenas. They all had to understand you don't take any risks in going to functions where you could pick up the virus and spread it to others. And I think that is one of the reasons why we certainly were able to finish as well as we did.

Bob Wallace: Congratulations. I know you and I have had a number of conversations about student athletes and stuff. I know as you approach your job and doing what's best for the MVC. The student athletes always very important to you. But college athletics is involved in a whole bunch of issues with college athletics. And the difference between the power of five that wants a time and a conference like yours and you know, the main image and likeness. Talk about some of the challenges that the Missouri Valley Conference has as opposed to the Big 10 and the Power Five conferences in dealing with their athletes and you know, the NIL things that are coming up.

Doug Elgin: Well, I'll start with the transfer of regulations that are changing, and we anticipate that there will be a one-time transfer exception where a student athlete at any institution can transfer to another institution and play immediately. And what that might signal, what a lot of people believe, is that when the players come to, were in the majors as you mentioned, the high majors or the autonomy five – the SEC, Big 12, Big 10, Pac 12, ACC – those power conferences, that the allure of student athletes to play at those schools is very strong, and I think when you have student athletes come to our level, so to speak, mid-major, the tendency might be to transfer it to a higher place. It doesn't always work out. But I think if you look at, right now the transfer portal, there's a, it's basically a mechanism where student athletes can report that they want to transfer by a certain date, and everybody in the country can see who is available as a transfer on that transfer portal. And what happens now is you've got literally hundreds and hundreds of student athletes that are in that transfer portal that want to transfer to another school. And I think it might signal that links like ours become almost foreign clubs for the high majors. And that hasn't proven to be the case for the Missouri Valley. I think we benefited more from transfers coming into our conference than we have those going out of it. Certainly in the last three years. When you look at Drake, their three key players were all transfers from other institutions. But I do think that the argument against having that freedom is one that if coaches can pull up roots and take another job, student athletes ought to have that same opportunity. You do worry about the negative aspect of student athletes not really being able to deal with adversity, fight their way through any issues they might have, whether it's a lack of playing time or a relationship they might have on a campus, or a reason that they want to go close to their home. There are positive and negative views of the transfer regulations but I think we're going to survive. It's going to be fine. It'll work out. And I think the NCAA is helping conferences and institutions to work their way through that.

Bob Wallace: So when you say a one-time, is it forever, and not just this year during the pandemic where they gave people an extra year. That's a rule going forward, you can transfer once?

Doug Elgin: If you're in good academic standing you can transfer once in any sport and I think it's, it hasn't passed the final hurdle. It will pass the membership. I'm sure that it will pass. But that will be in play and that is happening and there's a lot more transfers now, I believe, than there were five or 10 years ago.

Bob Wallace: Yeah, I mean, I'm sorry, I don't look at the transfer portal but, you know, every day there's someone else transferring from you know one school or another an I've seen, actually, a couple of people transfer like two years in a row.

Doug Elgin: Yeah.

Bob Wallace: So it's varied. What about the main image and likeness kind of controversy that's going on? How do you see that playing out?

Doug Elgin: Well, I think it's very difficult because there are a lot of state legislatures that passed laws, you know, they passed litigation or they passed legislation that enables student athletes to receive compensation for a variety of involvement, you know, with auto dealerships or with social media, being a spokesperson for a particular product. And I think the NCAA is doing the best they can to stay in front of that, to make regulations that are more natural and that don't render different states to have different rules and have advantages or disadvantages in the recruiting process. It's very complex. I don't pretend to understand all of it. I don't have to understand all of it, obviously with my departure in 60 days.

Bob Wallace: Haha.

Doug Elgin: But I do think it is going to provide student athletes with an ability, if you're a recent student and you can play in or if you just want to make money on the side, why not in athletics. If there's something that you can do that could bring in revenue or can put you in a better place financially, why not find a way to do that. And I think that's what the NCAA's project is, in short-term is finding ways to create an even playing field and, within reason, ways for athletes to be compensated. And not to suggest that if a student athlete goes to Yale, as you did, Bob, and in this day and age certainly when you look at the benefits – free education – all of the benefits that you have with nutrition and training and educational academic support. That's worth a ton of money. So in essence they're being paid already with a full scholarship.

Bob Wallace: Right. So do you see the difference in, obviously, this past NCAA we had a controversy about the differences between the women's and men's basketball tournament. And when you talk about name, image and likeness I've heard one, one argument is that the woman athlete who's in some sport, tennis for instance, probably may have a better opportunity to

make money outside of the starting quarterback on a division one football team. How do you think the inequities in men and women's sports will play out over the next few years?

Doug Elgin:

Well I think, without thinking about NIL (the name, image and likeness part of it), what just became apparent this March was the differences between the management and the support and the resources that are poured into the men's tournament versus the women's. And it's inexcusable. It really is. And I think that the NCAA and the member conferences and institutions are going to have to oversee that. They're going to have to attack the inequities, make sure that it's comparable, that it follows Title 9. What was shown in a graphic way was the difference between the set-up of the weight training rooms. The men have a lavish weight training facility with every kind of equipment you can imagine. The women's was done with a stack of barbells. That was it. And that was obviously an embarrassment. It's something that-- First of all, let me say this. The NCAA championship staff did an incredible job to make sure that both March Madness on the men's and women's side could be safely guided through to completion. They played the entire tournaments all the way through. There were other sites there. It won't happen again, I'm certain. I think we've got to be very careful to make sure that we followed Title 9 regulations and that we do value the women's experience and the men's experience equally. And that's something that can't happen again and I would assume that it won't happen again.

Bob Wallace:

So, you are, as I mentioned you've been involved in NCAA governance for a lot and one of the things that you did was you were on the men's basketball committee. Talk about that experience. That seemed, that's sort of like the highlight of an administrator's career in NCAA. To be on that committee, that's a big-time responsibility. Talk about that a little bit, Doug.

Doug Elgin:

It was really a tremendous professional experience for me. And what helped me was that I got to know a lot of the people in powerful positions, people in power. And through the mentors that I had mentioned earlier. And, you know, I think the focus that I had here on basketball was, I think they're a good fit. I didn't have to worry about football certainly in my oversight, and it really gave me insights to how the tournament field is selected, what programs need to do to put themselves in the best possible position to be selected as an at-large entry in the NCAA tournament. I really had some great professional relationships with other people that were on these committees. I served four years on it from 1999, I think, to 2002. And, you know, I would be onsite managing a site at each stage of the tournament in those four years. It was really, I think, good for the Missouri Valley to have someone in the room so to speak. There are nine people on that committee. One chair. And you could speak to your teams if questions were asked. You tried to be as fair as you could possibly be in the way you looked at institutions whether they were in A-5 conferences or whether they were in mid-major conferences. And I think that really was a real growth experience for me to be on the committee.

Bob Wallace: It's always good to have somebody in the room, so, we are in the room and then one of your coaches came to you and said, why didn't we make the tournament. Do you ever have any of those conversations with ADs or coaches?

Doug Elgin: Well, absolutely. And you always had to do what you could to put your teams in that position, and that's not only helping them get the strongest schedules that they could possibly handle, but working through the year and talking with other committee members when I wasn't on the committee, like this year I had two, three individuals that called me about every two weeks to talk about her teams. And you had to do the research. You had to provide the bullet points and the information as to why I thought that we should have at least two teams at the conference and worked out that way with Loyola and Drake making it into the NCAA tournament this year.

Bob Wallace: Well, and you talked about being in the room and being part of that and then I think part of having you be such a prominent figure in the college athletic world, you were able to bring a tournament to St. Louis in 2005. And we had beautiful weather for that week. So, I will say the St. Louis Final Four and as I said I had been in the Final Four since 1991. I'd been to every one but two, I think. And I think that was one of the best ones. Talk about, say, can we get another one. Now that you're leaving and you don't have to do the work, can we ever get another one in St. Louis?

Doug Elgin: Probably not a men's Final Four because the Dome is no longer able to, it doesn't have a full-time tenant, which really hurts, and the customized seating I think has been shipped out. And it's not, I don't think that's critical. I think we are still in a hunt for bids for opportunities to host. The Sports Commission has done an incredible job not only in basketball but you look at the events Frank Vivirito and his staff have brought to town, it's mind-boggling to think of that. But we're onboard to get a, I think it's a 2025 event, we're hosting the first and second round. We were disappointed not to have more opportunities there. And I think it's important for civic and corporate St. Louis to align when we have better opportunities to provide the best possible experience here, whether it's having the hotel rooms that you need in place when the bids are sent out, locking those hotel rooms in a contract so that we can bring large groups to St. Louis. But I do think with what we've seen at the Enterprise Center, we're in position for the next decade certainly to bring in a lot of events. Looking past 2025, we're going to be in play to bring an awful lot of not only men's basketball events. You could bet on a women's Final Four that would be played in Enterprise Center, and we hosted two women's Final Fours in St. Louis in the last 20 years.

Bob Wallace: Yeah. No, actually I think, you know, we're so centrally located. I'm disappointed that we can't get a men's one here because I think, and I've been here for a number of World Series. I've been here for Rams playoff runs. I thought that Final Four was probably one of the best sporting events we've had in town in really since my 40 years of being here in town.

Doug Elgin: Uh.

Bob Wallace: As you leave, Doug, tell me what have you left for your success? I mean, is there something that you didn't get done that you wanted to get done, unfinished business of your tenure here that you want to talk about?

Doug Elgin: I think, you know, I'm so thankful to the St. Louis Police and Enterprise Center for extending our men's contract here. They signed a contract. That needs to be a major focus for our conference staff moving forward. I think keeping our women's tournament at a mutual site, it's in Moline, Illinois, which is a great place for that. Bringing championships here, golf, for instance, is coming here. One of our golf tournaments is coming here very soon.

Bob Wallace: Where will you play that?

Doug Elgin: Um, I'm embarrassed. I can't remember the course at the time.

Bob Wallace: It's all right.

Doug Elgin: But I do think that the, just the opportunity to keep our championships vibrating, growing and progressive and revenue-producing. I think we've got to do what we can to continue to find sponsors for our television. We do over 800 live events a year for television that we produce either through companies that are in the television production business or on campus, where each of our campuses can now produce network-quality productions for TV. So, that's another important thing. But I just want to speak to the new Commish who's coming in. Jackson is a Cornell graduate. What league is that in, Bob?

Bob Wallace: I don't know. Cornell, is that in the ivory tower? We weren't sure if that was the state school in the ivies.

Doug Elgin: He played football and basketball at Cornell. He has worked at, he spent 30 years as an assistant and head coach in college basketball. And all over the country in places like Stanford, Vanderbilt, St. Bonaventure, Berman, in his career, so he brings certainly a level of experience and insight that most conference commissioners never have, and that's an ability to coach and certainly to coach as long as he has. He's worked at two conference offices, the Big South, and now most recently at the Big 12 conference in Dallas. He's the Executive Associate Commissioner. He'll start here formally on July 1st, but just a really great guy who has got great experience in the business. And I think we're going to see, I think he's going to really raise the bar here for this conference.

Bob Wallace: And what advice have you given him – watch Gary Robinson proudly?

Doug Elgin: Haha

Bob Wallace: I can see that because I know Gary.

Doug Elgin: Gary's retired, of course. Antitrust lawyer that you know well, I'm sure, Bob. From your dealings with him and the NFL. Great guy, by the way. You

know, I think we've, I've given him as much background as I can on what we've done and what I think we need to do moving forward. I've always felt like it's a threat when a high-level basketball coaching job, for example, opens. And we might lose a coach. We did. We lost two coaches. The women's coach at Drake has left for another job. Porter Mosure as you mentioned is going to Oklahoma. The Drake women's coach is going to Oklahoma as well. So, we lose two of our better coaches that have moved on to A-5 opportunities. I've always viewed that as a setback, to have come in here saying, that's a positive. When you have coaches moving on to better situations you're going to get the very best of coaches that want to come and coach in your league. And that's probably true. And what's happened there I know that hiring at Loyola is tremendous. It's from the staff and you know, I think what we're going to see here is a continuation of the league hiring great coaches. And certainly the postseason success that we've had here. That's one of the things I'm proudest of. You look at our two basketball programs, men's and women's, what our teams have done coming out of our two tournaments on the men's side, the teams that they've beaten in the NCAA tournament, it reads like a top 20. It really does. It's crazy. You look at the brand names that they've beaten. UCLA, Louisville, Oklahoma, Florida on an inside, Kansas three times. Once when they were the top team in the tournament. On the women's side, beating Duke, beating North Carolina, advancing to the Final Four, Southwest Missouri State, a directional institution at the time, now Missouri State of course. The success that they've all had in postseason really makes you understand that the NCAA tournament is the great event that it is because you only have to beat an opponent one time to advance. And it's the best sporting event on Earth, I think. Other than maybe the Olympics.

Bob Wallace: Well, Doug, thank you very much for taking the time. You did say you gave Dep some advice on what he should do. If you don't mind sharing. Give me one piece of nugget that you said, this is what you've got to do when you get here, you know, at the top of my list, I'm not going to get to it but you got to deal with it. And you send it out, if it's confidential just say it.

Doug Elgin: This is ongoing. And he knows it. I mean, he lives it. He's been a coach. I said, you've got to continue to emphasize the importance of strong non-conference scheduling. And, if you have a team that's worthy of getting an at-large bid and they have a terrible nonconference schedule, it doesn't matter how dominant you are in your conference, for the most part, in most cases. If you don't play good teams, strong teams, out of conference and beat some of them, you're not going to get into the NCAA tournament. So, you have to gamble. You have to take that step of scheduling strong. And if you fail to win in those games, you know you have to win your conference tournament to get into the NCAA tournament. Otherwise if you have a weak conference schedule you can still do extremely well in your regular season in your own conference tournament, but if you don't win automatic qualification by winning your tournament championship, you're not going to get in the tournament. So, I mean, it's, that's not certainly anything that people don't understand but it's, you have to continuously reach for that, I think, in order for your conference, for all your coaches to feel confident,

getting that stronger schedule. Your institutions have to give your coaches more security and support, I think, when they make that step. Winning 20 games shouldn't be the goal. Winning, getting your team to have the highest profile they can possibly have, with success. Conference is really important and a key to getting more teams in the NCAA tournament.

Bob Wallace: Well that's great. Let me ask you, my final question to you is, a broader picture than just the MVC, but you're kind of the talent tsar of athletics. What's the one thing that needs to be dealt with in college athletics in the next few years?

Doug Elgin: There are a lot of things. There's just a whole bunch of touchpoints here. You got to, we need greater diversity inclusion in all aspects of college athletics – hiring and opportunities and such. We have to insure gender equity across the board. I worry about sports gambling and that influence that it could have on collegiate sports. You know the name, image and likeness legislation will, I think, put college athletics in a better place. Right now there's a lot of impetus to change amateurism in college athletics and I think name, image and likeness doesn't have to do that. I think if it's a national standard, if it doesn't upset the balance that we'd like to see, that we'd like to think we have opportunities. Those are things that we really need to be concerned about. The worry about litigation and lawsuits in the industry and we've got to do everything that we can to avoid those types of situations.

Bob Wallace: Well, Doug, thank you very much for taking the time. I think our listeners understand why you lasted 33 years in a profession that has a lot of turnover, a lot of egos. Your thoughtfulness, your reasonableness truly came through. So, thank you for taking the time. Good luck in retirement. I'm hoping that we'll see each other. I think St. Louis would be foolish not to tap into your expertise as a consultant down the line, and use you for, you know, the knowledge that you bring. So, thank you very much. To our listeners, I just hope you enjoyed listening to Commissioner Elgin and got a sense of some of what goes on beyond the lines. I hope you did enjoy it and our other podcasts you can provide your feedback by going to Apple podcasts and going to the ratings view the section for our podcast. If you listen on Stitcher, go to [stitcher.com](https://www.stitcher.com). And if there's a topic you would like to hear us discuss, please let us know. Thank you for listening.

Doug Elgin: Thank you, Bob.