



After the Buzzer

Transcript: Bob Wallace's interview with Josh Whitman of the University of Illinois

Episode posted: September 10, 2018

Bob Wallace: Welcome to After the Buzzer. I'm Bob Wallace, the chair of the Sports Law practice at Thompson Coburn, a nationwide law firm of 380 attorneys with offices across the country.

Altogether I've spent 30 years in the national sports arena. What we want to do is host a smart, probative show dedicated to discussing issues that impact sports or that sports impacts. We hope to discuss topics and issues beyond the score, beyond the winners and losers, beyond who gets hired and fired. I want to talk about the how's, the why, the when's, and the because's.

As we are about to begin the college football season I could think of no better person to kick off my first episode than Josh Whitman, the Director of Athletics for the University of Illinois.

Josh was hired in 2016, and at that time he was at 37, and the youngest athletic director among Power 5 ADs. In addition he is a proud U of I alum and football player and has both his Bachelor's degree in Finance and Law Degree from Illinois. He has practiced law in DC, clerked for Judge Michael Kanne in US Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit, and played pro football. He started his collegiate athletic administration career also at Illinois, before he moved onto the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and eventually to Washington University in St. Louis before returning to his alma mater.

Josh didn't inherit a juggernaut. The football program and basketball programs, the flagships and revenue drivers, and perhaps drainers, for most college programs were immersed in controversy and with very limited success.

Competing in the Big 10 doesn't make it easier. But Josh jumped in headfirst. He made a high attention change in football coaches within days of taking over. He has 5 other new head coaches, including women and men's basketball coaches. He has become a prodigious fund raiser which will help in constructing or updating facilities to improve athletic performance.

And performance has improved and Illinois has jumped 18 spots in the Learfield Director's Cup standing among Division I programs, and Illinois varsity teams have made 18 NCAA postseason appearances during Josh's Illinois tenure.

At After the Buzzer we want to learn and talk about success, smarts and strategic thought. At Illinois under Josh Whitman, "Unity, Develop, Inspire and Achieve are the core of their mission statement

In my great conversation with Josh, we talked about: Josh's background in the law — and how he uses his legal background in his day-to-day work heading an athletic office; the life of student athletes and, in the wake of the Rice Commission, what programs can do to help student athletes manage time, manage their studies, and succeed on and off the field.

Josh also tells us the one he would do away if he had a magic wand. (And I'll give you a hint: It involves tweets, likes and shares.)

My thanks again to Josh Whitman for his time. Here's my conversation with him.

Josh Whitman: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be with you.

Bob Wallace: So, Josh, you have a very interesting career. You played football at Illinois, as I said, and then you worked there for a little while and you played a little pro football. Give us a little bit of your background.

Josh Whitman: Well, I grew up in West Lafayette, Indiana, not far from Purdue University and I had the opportunity to cross the state lines. Studied finance here at the University of Illinois and played football in the late '90s. Left here and bounced around the National Football League for about four years. Made a run at that, and then returned here in about 2005. Went to law school and worked here in the athletic program. A mentor of mine, Ron Guenther, was the athletic director at the time, and he provided me incredible opportunity and exposure to all the different interworkings of a major college athletic program. Left here and clerked up in Chicago for a year and then worked for a large law firm out in Washington DC for a short time before reentering into college athletics. It was up at UW La Crosse, and then at Wash U, as you said. For me it was really the fulfillment of a dream when I had the chance to come back here to my alma mater.

When I'd first gotten to know Ron as an undergraduate, I identified being a college athletic director as my goal. It's what I wanted to do and never really was even bold enough to think that I might be able to do it here and to do it as young as I was able to get the position. It's just been really an incredible honor and one that I continue to be excited about every day.

Bob Wallace: So why college athletics? You said that was sort of a dream of yours.

Josh Whitman: Yes, I think for me it was really the place where I could intersect two things. One, it was an intersection of my love for sports, which I have grown around my entire life. And then secondly was a connection of my business training and of higher education. I grew up around education. Both of my parents were

teachers. From my earliest memories I had a book in one hand and a ball of some form in the other. And I just love the college environment. I believe in the social importance of college athletics, the way that we bring together communities of people, whether it be on a campus or in a local neighborhood or city, or even across an entire state. And so to me there's just so much good about college athletics, and it was a great opportunity for me to use my business background and my legal training, perhaps in a slightly nontraditional sense.

Bob Wallace: So, why the law, Josh? Tell me what made you decide that you were going to become a lawyer?

Josh Whitman: I always encourage students when they talk to me about careers; I tell them they need a circle. They need an inner circle of people who are going to help them make important decisions about what steps to take, particularly in their professional life. And for me, when I was finishing up my football career I talked to a number of people I trusted; people who had become mentors and friends, people who knew my goals, who knew my skill set. And there was certainly an understanding that I needed to pursue additional education, and the question was what degree made the most sense. And given my business undergraduate, I think there was a feeling that an MBA would be a little bit redundant. And I felt strongly that I wanted it to be a professional degree. I didn't think that a master's in sports administration, for example, would help distinguish me enough from other people who were pursuing the same positions that I was interested in.

And so the law, at the time, was just becoming more and more commonplace among major college athletic directors. You had Jack Swarbrick become the athletic director out of a firm in Indianapolis. You had Fred Glass become an athletic director out of a firm in Indianapolis. You had Morgan Burke at

Purdue who was becoming an AD. Pat Haden out at USC was an athletic director and attorney. So it was a little more commonplace, and it seemed to me that as the business evolves, as the complexities increase, as the risk magnified, that having that skill set would serve someone sitting in this chair well, and I've been pleased that I was right.

Bob Wallace: From a career trajectory point, you clearly were right. But what about being a lawyer, do you think, has helped you in your position now?

Josh Whitman: I talk a lot about what I call the soft skills of lawyering, and I think that every day I use certainly my communication skills; learning how to write and speak effectively; how to be a strong advocate for a cause. I certainly have changed the way I approach problems, how you think creatively about different issues, how you evaluate situations from all different angles and perspectives. And then you do have occasion to use even more directly your lawyering skills, whether it be in negotiation, contract review and writing, on occasion criminal law, which is something that we would rather not use.

Bob Wallace: {Laughs} Right.

Josh Whitman: But it pops up in all different settings and I have been really fortunate to have that training and have found it to be very useful on a daily basis.

Bob Wallace: What you're describing sounds very familiar to sort of the way I approach it. Now I am much older than you, so, you know, just the ability to solve problems, the law school can distinguish you in sort of a career path for all the things that I considered back in the late '70s when I was making some of the decisions that you made. So after you went to Illinois and working in Ron's office, you then go to the University of Wisconsin, Whitewater, and then to Wash U; two division three programs. Talk a little bit about the challenges of

a division three program, and as you look at that, as they kind of compare to Illinois, you know, a Power Five conference job.

Josh Whitman: Yes, I think for me that was probably the most important professional decision I ever made was to leave Covington and go to Wisconsin La Crosse, where I'd never been. I'd never been in La Crosse, Wisconsin. I didn't know anybody there. I was unfamiliar with division three. I grew up around Purdue and around Illinois. And I took a 50% pay cut and moved across the country. I believed in the vision. I believed in the profession. And it was eye-opening. It was an unbelievable experience to be up there for four years; to have my horizons broadened to include that division three experience to understand those student athletes, those coaches, those communities and how they rally around that opportunity.

It did require some recalibration. There's no question that it's a different environment. You walk in, you certainly don't have the resources at your disposal that you do at a place like Illinois. You're not going to have the same microscope that you're operating under. You're not going to have as much visibility. There won't be as many fans in the stands. But it's a very pure form of athletic competition. And your student athletes are there for the right reasons. They're not on athletic scholarships. And they're doing it because they love to compete; they love to participate in their sport. And so it was incredibly rewarding. And the thing that I loved about it was in that environment your staff is so much smaller, it forces everybody to be a generalist. You have to become active in all different areas of the operation. And I think that has really helped me as I've transitioned into different positions, now. I'm certainly not a master of anything, but I have tried almost everything. And that allows me to have a fluency as I work with our marketing staff or with our event management staff or our facility staff, that I

think someone maybe who came up through the Power Five and was a specialist from the beginning maybe would lack.

And so it's been a great experience. And then of course transitioning here to Illinois, in a lot of ways it's different, but in I would say the most important ways it's very much the same. You're still dealing with student athletes. You're still talking about education. You're still making personnel decisions. You're still raising money. You're still developing a strategic plan and executing that plan. So there's a few more zeros on the balance sheet, there are a few more staff listed on the directory, a few more people in the stands, but at the end of the day the core mission of what we do I think is very much the same, whether you're talking about division one or division three.

Bob Wallace: I'm not as familiar with Wisconsin, Whitewater, although I did go up there once when I was with the Rams and we were looking at training camps. What did they use to call that, the Cheese League up there?

Josh Whitman: It's a great league, yes. All state schools. And now having traveled around a little bit more widely in division one, what I've realized is that a lot of these upper tier division three programs could compete with a lot of lower tier division one programs. It's really just a question of what that school chose to brand itself as; what division it chose to associate itself with. But in terms of the resources, in terms of the quality of the competition, some of these powerful division three programs really could, I think, hold up well against even some mid-tier division one teams. So it's interesting up there. The Cheese League, as you said, is really a step forward and has developed a nice brand.

Bob Wallace: But Wash U, now I'm a little bit more familiar with because they're here in St. Louis, and you're dealing with really, really smart kids that are getting into

one of the top schools in the country. And they're having read stories about Wash U players, I mean you've got a bunch of kids that were on that team that were going to go to med school and who were juggling labs, so it's a little bit of a different experience for the student athlete at those schools, is it not?

Josh Whitman: It is, and that was also a bit eye-opening for me. I'm a public school guy by nature. I grew up in the public schools. I'd never been associated with a private school. And so to be at Wash U and to be around students of that caliber from that background was different, and certainly exciting to understand what some of their dreams and aspirations were and some of the different doors that might be open to them. But even so, at the end of the day it still was, whether you're talking about UW La Crosse, Wash U or the University of Illinois, it doesn't matter how many people are cheering them when the lights go on. They're still 18 to 22-years-old. They've still got a lot of the same challenges that they're working through. They're learning how to be adults. They're dealing with family issues. They're dealing with maturity issues. They're just struggling to learn about themselves and make good choices every day and put themselves in a position to be successful when their time in college is over. And so at that level it really was very much the same. And that has been very rewarding for me.

Bob Wallace: Well that's a perfect lead-in to talking about you returning to Illinois. And the program that you inherited wasn't – you know, not at the top of the Big Ten when you got there. Within days you hired Lovie Smith. You eventually hired a new basketball coach after the season, I believe, right? A new women's basketball coach.

Josh Whitman: I did.

Bob Wallace: What was kind of the status of the program that you inherited and where do you feel you are right now?

Josh Whitman: I think we were a program that needed attention. We were a program that had so much potential and that needed a new vision, some new energy. You know, it was a place that understands what it takes to get to the top of the mountain, but we'd struggled to stay there. And we'd had some self-inflicted wounds over the last number of years leading up to my arrival. And we just needed to turn the page and put a bold vision in front of people and move forward. And I think that over the last two and a half years now we've done a lot of heavy lifting. We've put some big plans in place. We've moved some people around and feel really strongly about the leadership that we have within the program from our coaching staff and our senior administration. And excited now about starting to see some of these plans and some of this hard work that has been put in here over these last years start to bear some fruit and ultimately yield greater success, both in the competitive arena, but also in the classroom and in the personal lives of our students.

Bob Wallace: So now you're the new guy coming in. And I assume that you inherited a staff. How do you get them to buy-in to the Josh Whitman vision of the program?

Josh Whitman: Well, I think that's the real key is, to me, leadership in an organization like this one is all about trust. And I think that any organization rises and falls with how much the people within it trust each other. And we've tried to be very communicative with the staff. We've tried to be transparent. And we've invested a lot of time in getting to know people, understand what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are. We don't shy away from difficult conversations. We try and put people in positions to play to their strengths. And so it's been a process. You want people to know that you're invested in

them, that you're prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with them and swing the sledgehammer right next to them. And I think there's a lot to be said for that. They don't want somebody that's going to sit up in the marble tower and look down. I think they want somebody that's going to roll their sleeves up and get dirty with them.

And that's what we needed here. We needed a lot of work to be done. And we've, I think, got a great team in place; people who care a lot about this place. And they've come together well and I'm just really proud of the work that they've done and continue to do to help Illinois realize this incredible potential that we have.

Bob Wallace: So what keeps you up at night worrying about being successful at Illinois? What are the problems that keep Josh Whitman up at night?

Josh Whitman: I think it's probably a lot of the same things that keep my colleagues up at night. I think that we work in an increasingly complex and difficult industry. And we're in a place now where the stakes are very high. The visibility is incredibly high. The pressure sort of comes with it. And we want our programs to be successful, but we want – I tell our staff and our student athletes when we get to the top of the mountain we don't want anybody to be able to question the means that we used to get there. And as you see now any time you get on ESPN or get on the news, there's always a headline about something that's happened wrong in college sports.

And so we work very hard at what I call playing defense. And I think that my job is divided and I have some things that are offensive in nature and I really enjoy those, and have a growing number of things that are more defensive in nature, and don't always enjoy those as much, but they're every bit as important to making sure that we avoid what we call capital C crises; that

we're able to continue executing our plans because we've got a good foundation in place, a good culture. But it's hard, because in college athletics there are literally thousands of people out there who I will never meet who have the opportunity to do something in appropriate that could end an entire era of the program. And that's unsettling, to say the least.

Bob Wallace: Yes, I would imagine that would keep you up at night. One of the things that we had done here at our firm is kind of look at a program which we call the offseason audit, which was we would go in college programs to sort of help them identify whether they had the proper processes in place for when something happens. Not to talk about another school, but like what happened at Ohio State. And when somebody's not taking the steps because maybe they don't know what the steps are. I always say coaches are like parents to some extent, that it's their program and their first instinct when something bad happens is how do I fix it, not what do I need to do to make sure that we're compliant with what our protocols are. Do you have a – I mean I think your legal background probably has set you up for putting in those proper procedures so that you catch yourself, or you catch the problems early.

Josh Whitman: I think that's right, and I think what you just said there at the end is the key. I think that too often people think, well, that's too hard or we'll just deal with that later. And I think a hallmark of our time here has been we're going to be as proactive as we can be. And when potential issues crop up, we're going to address them, we're going to talk about them and we're going to fix them. And I think the other thing that we've seen is sometimes programs struggle when they don't have a good plan. And so we've worked aggressively here over the last number of years to try and anticipate potential problems, to try and self evaluate and look for gaps or risks within our existing protocols and shore those up. And it's been an ongoing process, a very intensive process, but one that I think has paid dividends, will continue to pay dividends.

It really comes down to your culture, but it comes down to you planning in advance to confront some of these things. And one of the challenges is you can't, of course, predict exactly what's going to happen, so you've got to put things in place that are flexible enough, but yet smart enough that you're able to address a number of different issues that may arise.

Bob Wallace: Yes, I had a conversation with an athletic director from a very big program who told me that they were very proud of the fact that they had embedded into their football program a compliance person. And I kind of said to them do you think that's a problem that, you know, your \$45,000 compliance coordinator who's embedded in your football program is really going to tell your \$3 million football coach that he can't do something? And I just thought that was problematic for them, and they ended up getting in trouble. But I'm not sure that was the reason, but they ended up getting in trouble because the coach was taking things into his own hands.

Josh Whitman: And that's something that we've seen, I think, time and again. And that's, as we've put some of our processes in place, that has been a focus is looking for the appropriate places where it's better to pass the baton to somebody else than it is for us to carry it forward ourselves. And so when it comes to evaluating misconduct by our student athletes, for example, we're going to rely on other people to conduct those investigations and to look into what may or may not have happened.

And certainly back to your point about the compliance coordinator, I think what's important in those settings is, you know, the compliance person doesn't have to tell the football coach what he can or can't do, but he's got to be able to tell the athletic director. And then the athletic director can stand there and provide that support. And that's, I think, important is everybody's

got to answer to somebody else. And making sure that those positions stay in balance relative to where they fit within the organizational structure is, I think, really critical to these programs being run well and appropriately.

Bob Wallace: Yes, I mean some of what we're seeing, as you said, when you turn on ESPN or you pick up a newspaper is academic fraud, students having trouble in school. And part of it may be because they're spending so much time on the sports field that it's hard to keep up academically. How do you deal with that balance?

Josh Whitman: We have invested incredible amounts of resources in making sure that our student athletes have people and facilities and programs around them to help them navigate being a college student athlete. We tell them when they come to campus that being a student athlete at the University of Illinois is hard. It's suppose to be hard, and there's no way around that. But, that if they invest their time and their energy and their focus into fulfilling their potential as a student, as an athlete, as a person, that this place will change their life.

And our obligation to them is A) not to bring them here if we think that with all the support that we're able to provide them they still can't be successful. But assuming that they can be, we will bring them here and then we have a responsibility to them to be sure that they're receiving the support that they need in terms of their academics, in terms of their life preparation, in terms of their career development, their leadership so that they're able to navigate all those things. And it is; it's tough. Each hour of every day is a function of them deciding how best to spend that hour. And a lot of those hours are spent on football or some other sport, but a lot of those other hours are spent on the books and making sure that they're hitting their coursework the way that they need to in order to ultimately earn their degrees.

Bob Wallace: The Commission on College Basketball came down with some new recommendations. Part of them were on AAU basketball and allowing players to have agents coming out of high school to evaluate where they stand. I had a son who played a lot of AAU basketball and I saw sort of the seedy side of that business, where there are just people just hanging out, you know, not necessarily looking out for the best interest of the kid, but looking out for the best interest of themselves, whether it's placing them somewhere or sneakers or just being a big shot in the community. And now we've added that other layer of, well, now they can get someone to evaluate. Do you see that maybe causing some problems down the line?

Josh Whitman: I hope not. Certainly time will tell, but I applaud the NCAA for taking the steps that they have. I think that for once I think we're taking action. Although the plan might not be perfect, I think we are not waiting for perfection. I think we're just looking for progress. And I think that the steps that they put in place on the heels of the Rice Commission promise progress. And we will see over time which things yield better results than perhaps others. But I think that the NCAA has sort of stepped outside of its standard procedures in order to move as proactively and quickly as it has. I really tip my hat to the organization, to the membership, because I know that our intentions are right, that our hearts are in the right place. We'll try some of these things out and see what the impact is.

Bob Wallace: And then you're happy with sort of the autonomous five and the group of the bigger colleges that are kind of able to be more nimble and make decisions? You think that's working well?

Josh Whitman: I do. Ultimately it allows us to invest some of the resources that we have at our disposal into a superior experience for our student athletes. That's ultimately what matters. And if some of the dollars available in some of the

programs at our level has increased, it's right that we reinvest a significant portion of those dollars directly into our students. The autonomy five legislation allows us the flexibility to do that. And I think that we've seen some big wins over the last number of years that have demonstrated what that flexibility means for the experience of our students.

Bob Wallace: Jim Delany, your commissioner, I've talked to him a number of times and read some things that he said; he thinks that we're asking our student athletes to spend too much time on their sport, and therefore they're missing out on some of the college experience. Basketball, for instance, is at least a two semester sport. Football, if you go to a bowl game, is a two semester sport. Is there a way that maybe we should look at making these one semester sports so that the second semester the kid can go on an exchange program, can do some things outside of just being an athlete?

Josh Whitman: Yes, I don't know that that's necessary. I think in reality most of our student athletes, certainly the ones who grow to be the most successful, are driven internally to be great. And so whether you put artificial restraints on their required activities or not, I think they're still going to spend roughly the same amount of time invested in improving themselves athletically, putting themselves into position to be the best they can be. I think that we have made some modifications to their schedule that will ultimately serve them well. We went through a pretty rigorous time management analysis as part of the NCAA process here in the last two years that frees up more time for them. It clears them with some days off. It allows for more days throughout the year where they don't have any obligations.

And also I think you've seen a number of schools now start to encourage their students to leave for a portion of the summer. It allows them to, as you said, perhaps take a trip. We've even had football players here in the last couple of

years who have taken international trips during the short summer session at the beginning of the summer term. And so I think that we're, again, making positive steps in the right direction. Is it perfect? No, but I think that the untold story a lot of times for these elite athletes is that they want to be great. They're driven to be great. And when I was playing football, I didn't need a coach telling me you need to be in the weight room at this time to lift. I wanted to be in the weight room to lift. And most of the athletes who are competing at this level have that same opinion.

Bob Wallace: Well that's great. So, I mean, you said that it's not perfect. So I'm making you the college czar. What would you change to make it perfect?

Josh Whitman: There are a couple of growing challenges. Certainly I think that social media is growing to be a real concern in terms of the direct access that it gives anybody to our student athletes. There was a time not too long ago when I think there was a general understanding that amateur student athletes, college student athletes were sort of off-limits to fans. If they wanted to get on a radio show or they wanted to write a letter to the editor of the newspaper, they knew that they could take shots at professional athletes, but when it came to college sports they took their shots at the coaches; they took their shots at the administration. But they refrained from directly attacking the students.

And what's happened now in the age of social media is every fan has a direct access point to our student athletes. And it's really, really hard for them to persevere in the face of adversity when they have Joe Fan on the other end of Twitter telling them how bad they stink. And that's hard for a 19-year-old or a 20-year-old. And again, I think that's sometimes lost. People forget how old these people are. They think because they see them on TV or they're catching passes in front of 95,000 people that they're full-blown adults with all the wisdom and maturity and tough skin that comes with that, but they're not.

And that's asking a lot of our students. And it's something that I hope we can remedy. And I don't have a great solution other than to ask all of our kids to get off social media. But realistically that's not about to happen.

So I think that's one growing concern that I have is just the mental health of our student athletes. I think we're seeing a growing number of student athletes struggle with mental health, in part because of the social media; in part because of the expectations that I think are heaped upon them by fans, by communities. And it is. As I said, it's hard to be a student athlete at Illinois or any other school like Illinois. And so helping them navigate. Students are playing earlier than they ever have. We're seeing fewer and fewer red shirts. They're being thrust into the limelight even earlier than they were ten years ago. They're being asked to be successful at a major research institution, but also in front of a big spotlight on the athletic side as well. And that's tough. That's tough.

Bob Wallace: Right, especially when you're fundraising and you're charging for tickets and you've got luxury suites. And as your fans and boosters are spending more money, they kind of lose the line that these are kids as opposed to these are, you know, your Chicago Bears. You can boo the Chicago Bears; you shouldn't boo an 18-year-old.

Josh Whitman: I think that's right. And I applaud our fans for having expectations. We want them to expect us to be successful. But it's really about how you express that expectation and to whom you express it. I've just been around so many of these students and I've seen them struggle under the weight of the public limelight and the pressure that comes with that. And, you know, we sign up for that. I signed up for that. Our coaches signed up for that. But our students, no matter how ready they think they might be, it's an awfully big burden to bear for someone who's 18 to 19-years-old.

Bob Wallace: What kind of relationship can you have with the student athlete as the athletic director? Are you a mentor? Are you a friend? You're the man upstairs?

Josh Whitman: Yes, I think if anything I just try and be accessible. I want to be visible. I want them to know who I am. I want them, in a large part, to kind of dictate what kind of a relationship they want with me. If they want to be more active with me, they want to have meetings, they want to sit down and talk about their experience or if they have an interest in getting into our business, I always welcome those things. I try and be a resource for them. I want them to feel like they have a place they can go.

And we have a dozen different people within our staff for each student athlete who are outlets or resources. So I'm just one of many; whether it's an athletic trainer or an academic advisor, a nutritionist, a sports psychologist. But I want them to know who I am. I want them to know that I'm going to be a present, visible, accessible part of their experience here on campus. I think it's important that I not just be the guy upstairs; that they see me as an active part of their experience as an Illinois student athlete and that they're able to take advantage of me as a resource in whatever way makes most sense for them as their time here unfolds.

Bob Wallace: What will be a success for Illinois football and Illinois fall sports this year? What will make Josh Whitman smile all going into the basketball season?

Josh Whitman: Yes, for us it's really about improvement. I think across the board, whether you're talking about fall, winter or spring. I think that we've circled the '18-'19 years as the year that we expect to start to see progress in terms of our on field, on court performance. And again, we've done a lot of the heavy lifting. We've put a lot of groundwork in place and are looking forward to more

competitive programs across the board. And I think our fans will be excited. I think we're going to take some people by surprise. And I look forward to what the seasons hold for us.

Bob Wallace: And five years from now, Josh, what will you want people to be saying about Illinois athletics?

Josh Whitman: I want us to be the model. I want us to be the model athletic program across the country for a place that is able to pursue athletic, academic and personal excellence in equal pieces for all of its student athletes. I think our – I really think our mission statement says it best: unify, develop, inspire, achieve. Those are the four things that we've identified as our reasons for being. And we want to bring people together. We want to encourage them to be better, and we ultimately want them to be successful. And that can play its way out in any number of different contexts. And we've got that potential. Here at the University of Illinois we've got one of the great alumni bases in the world. We've got one of the great academic institutions in the world. We're in one of the most populous states with one of the best cities. There's no reason that we can't put all those things together and capitalize on it to make one of the great athletic programs in the country as well.

Bob Wallace: Well being in a neighboring state with you having an office in Illinois, we're rooting for all of that to happen. We would love to see you have success. Getting to know you, you know, over the past few years, I'm rooting for you personally and professionally that you have success. And really want to thank you for doing After the Buzzer. So, Josh, thank you very much and good luck on Saturday. Good luck for the rest of the season. Good luck on with all your programs.

Josh Whitman: It was my pleasure, Bob. Thanks for the time and look forward to talking to you again soon.