

Interview with: TIM MURRAY

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

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For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Transcript – Tim Murray

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Summary: Tim Murray talks about his early history growing up in New Jersey before attending East Stroudsburg University. He then started as an assistant coach at Marist College before eventually becoming athletic director himself. He talks about his experiences in this position as he has seen athletics develop at Marist.

GUS NOLAN: Today is September 11, a memorable day in the history of America. We have the occasion to introduce to you for our archives Tim Murray who is the athletic director here. Tim, what the idea is that we are trying to collect for the archives is to show you that list of people who have played I think a significant role in the development of Marist. And like we just said it took us a little longer to get to you because for the last 20 years you have been a very significant person here. And doing this, we want to do it kind of in a systematic way. Your experience before Marist, at Marist, accomplishments at Marist, and then looking into the crystal ball where you think we're going. But today is September 11 and we're just gonna start with...where were you on September 11?

TIM MURRAY: You know it's interesting because I was... At that time I was on the NCAA Championships cabinet, which was a national committee. We had a meeting scheduled for September 11, later in the afternoon in Philadelphia, and I was planning on driving. I had a young family then, two little kids in diapers, so I was at home. And I was called by my dad's secretary, Ella Sanford, Tom Sanford's wife...and said Tim you gotta turn the TV on, cause..

GN: You won't believe this

TM: You won't believe it. So I turned it on, and yeah it was just incredible. And I was just ready to leave the house anyways, so I came in, and at that time, the college was kind of preparing and bracing for what was gonna happen next. So obviously the meeting was cancelled, I spent a lot of time on the phone with my father, who worked all his life in New York City and lived in New Jersey, you know he...

GN: Did he use the tubes? How did he go back and forth? Did he

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TM: Well he traveled a lot too but his national office was in New York. He either drove sometimes when he got bored or he took the train, you know the path over from Newark, or he took the bus.

GN: We had a friend that came by the tubes as a firefighter and was killed in it. He came to help from Jersey. He was there when the second collapse took place.

TM: Interesting to note Gus, we have a young lady on our women's basketball team whose a freshman, whose father was a firefighter and was killed in 9/11.

GN: No kidding

TM: Yeah and she's now here at Marist, and really excited to be here. Yeah her mother is actually coming up tonight for a barbecue.

GN: Well this is an excellent start because what I want to say and ask of you is that, well these all happened when you were at Marist, but step back a little bit, where were you born, brought up early years, do you remember?

TM: My dad was a coal miner after returning from WWII. Mom lived out there as well she was an OR nurse in Winber, Pennsylvania. So I came from a big family, Catholic family, 5 kids. I don't even remember but I think I was probably 2 or 3 we moved to Ohio, and 1966 we moved to North Plainfield, New Jersey. And I was really raised in New Jersey, although we still have the homestead back even to this day, back in Cherry-tree, Pennsylvania, just outside of Barnsborrow. So, but yeah most of my life I was born in...raised in New Jersey.

GN: Where'd you go to grade school? Pennsylvania?

TM: No I was in Jersey. All of my older brothers and sisters, I was 4 out of 5, they all went to Catholic School when we were out in Pennsylvania, but I only went to public school, which was interesting. But uh, yeah so we uh...

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GN: Didn't do you harm, huh?

TM: No I don't think so, I mean.

GN: My wife went to public school for 20 years in New York City, you know and our best friends, well, many of our friends were...it just happened to be you know a tradition if the family could afford it....that's where we went

TM: And uh, again we were in North Plainfield, but we only stayed there until '67 when the Race Riots if you remember, in Newark. And I can to this day, I was only 4 or 5 then and I remember the National Guards coming down our street and we were told do not go past the window, do not go down the. It was a scary time and my dad said okay we're out of here. And he convinced the gentleman in Bridgewater, New Jersey, which had really good public schools to rent his house. That's how we got to Bridgewater, New Jersey.

GN: And college, did you get to college?

TM: I did, I was what I thought was a pretty good athlete.

GN: You found out when the competition hits you...

TM: Well yeah there's a pyramid for sure, but no I really enjoyed sport and athletics. Had a great relationship with my athletic directors in high school and middle school so that was what I wanted to do.

GN: What was your key sport? Basketball?

TM: Basketball and baseball both. I loved them both, and I played both in college at East Stroudsburg for a time. East Stroudsburg University in Pennsylvania. You know and again, it was a state school, it was one that I could afford, with a big family. Had a good experience there, you know and again I was fortunate in that I knew what I wanted to do, in terms of getting into athletic administration and coaching and so on so.

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GN: Just a sidebar, besides the athletic interest, do you have other interests? Do you read, do you have music, hobbies, stamp collection, anything like that? I guess with a big family you don't.

Survival is the more important thing.

TM: No uh, golf is definitely an interest. I enjoy golf. And I enjoy reading, history of World War II, really. You know intrigued by the sacrifices those guys made back then.

GN: I have an interesting war story, at the day of...September 1st. I was, I went up and I sat on the deck, the porch out there outside the Chapel. And I was sitting with this couple...Weissberg...Melinda Weissberg teaches here, she's an assistant professor in business, and I said you know this is a very significant day for me, September 1st, which was that Friday, 1944, I came to this building as a freshman in high school. Wow, and she said yeah, and then next April, '45, I stood on this porch for the burial of FDR, with the planes flying overhead and the guns salute, and in those days you could hear guns going off in Hyde Park. And her spouse next to us says interesting, on that day, my father was released from the German prison camp. He had been a German prisoner of War, and they released him, the German troops District 2 when FDR died. And I said that coincidence of that September 1st of me talking about this story and then the next April these events taking place.

TM: How long was he a prisoner?

GN: I don't know. But he was captured somewhere before '43, '44. So this...amazing.

TM: Incredible.

GN: Alright, to the moment then, let's come to Marist. How did you find Marist? Or did we find you?

TM: You may not be aware but...

GN: There's two parts to this

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TM: There is. I have served two tours here at Marist, I'm on my second.

GN: The second is longer than the first?

TM: Significantly, yeah. But when I finished my degree at East Stroussberg, I immediately started my master's in sports administration at Saint Thomas University down in Florida, just north of Miami. And as I was completing my master's degree, I was obviously starting to look for a position, and that time my thought, or my interest really, was to coach. And I had grown up at a basketball summer camp and had a lot of context in the basketball coaching world.

Obviously you take advantage the context that you know. You know the word got out that I was looking for a position within the community, the basketball community. And Dave McGary had just been offered the job in the late spring of 1986. And, although I didn't know Dave, I knew his top assistant Jeff Baur, who he had already hired, and I knew a lot of his network in the basketball community. And he was looking for a you know a young, energetic...He wasn't necessarily looking for a coach, and that was good because I was young. But he was looking for more of an administrative type person, and I had a pretty good skill set there. So he hired me in August of 1986, about two or three months into his tenure, to be like his, I guess it was third assistant. So I started here then with Dave.

GN: So you worked with he players on the floor? You know with movements and shots and plays?

TM: Yes, yeah I was one of the assistant coaches. You know I also handled the on-campus recruiting, the administrative travel, you know those type of things. And the camp.

GN: Oh the summer camp

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TM: Yeah, which was a big thing. I had a big background in summer camps, having grown up at a summer basketball camp. It was a good fit for me and a good fit for Dave. So that's how I got here first.

GN: That's '86?

TM: In '86. I stayed for three seasons, almost four years. I left the end of October in 1989. From there I went to Iona College in New Rochelle as assistant athletic director. Cause one of the things I also did at Marist when I was here my first time was worked in compliance. I had an interest in NCAA compliance, kind of the dark days of the athletic program when we were going through the NCAA investigation. And actually it was Dave McGary's staff that served the penalty for mistakes that were made prior. So that kind of peaked my interest and there wasn't a lot of that across the country. So uh, you know again, I tried to better myself by getting involved in the compliance, learning the manual, helping Marist, making sure that we did the right thing. And then I used that to get my first administrative position at Iona College. So I stayed at Iona working in compliance and other administrative responsibilities within their athletic program. From November 1st of '89 until February of '95, '95, so it was about five years or so

GN: Yeah yeah 20 years at this now...

TM: Yeah, so February of 1995 through Jerry Cox's help, he was the vice president of student affairs at that time. You know it was a long interview process, but I was thrilled to be offered you know the position here at Marist.

GN: To come as AD?

TM: To come back as Athletic Director, yeah. I was actually thrilled. I mean it was interesting, I love telling this story Gus, because the interview process was unbelievable. I think there was two full day on campus interviews. It was a phone interview with the committee. There was

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interviews with just Jerry Cox. Dean Cox, and in January before I got the job in February, I met with Dennis Murray in California, because I was out there for the NCAA Convention in San Diego. So I went up to his room, overlooking the bay out there, or whatever, the ocean. One of the first questions he asked me was, now how old are you. And I kind of chuckled and I said now Dr. Murray, you know you can't ask me that. But I said to him I said I'm 32 years old, I'm the same age that you were when you took over as President at Marist. He liked that answer. Which was pretty neat. But, no I mean the fact that Marist would give me the opportunity at that age was just incredible.

GN: Well

TM: Made it a little easier

GN: They could get confused and say oh, okay. Was Howie Bowen still around in these years?

TM: Oh yeah. When I returned as athletic director, he was still full-time faculty, and he was still the men's soccer coach.

GN: Oh the soccer coach yeah okay. Alright, describe Marist in that year. When you're coming back as athletic director. What's the status of the ship here? In other words, where is the basketball, well with Rik Smits having come and gone we had already gone into the NCAA and made ourselves known. So we were not nobody. But we were not really I don't think such a Power House in the minds of others. Right or wrong?

TM: No I mean I think that's, that's a fair assessment. I mean we had kind of our three or four years of..

GN: Of glory

TM: Of glory. And again, the NCAA sanctions were something that, you know...not to get into whether they were fair or not fair, but you know kind of put us back on our heels a little bit and

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maybe in some ways had us reflect on how exactly we wanted our athletic program to be run. So from my perspective I used that to make sure that we always operated with the utmost integrity. Which is what I knew what our trustees and obviously Dr. Murray wanted as well. So on some levels all of those issues helped me when I came back in terms of the leadership and the way we wanted to do things, you know. There wasn't any external influence that said hey we want you to win so bad, we need you to get into the grey area. There is no grey area. There is a right way and a wrong way. And I think that's the type of leadership that Dennis has had and the type of leadership I have been able to also have. But Dave McGarity had been our coach when I returned in '95, about nine or ten years I believe. We were in a conference which, I think, when we got in that conference, the Northeast Conference, the institution was maybe similar to those. But I think in the time that we had been in there, you know we had grown. Both in terms of our reputation, but more importantly our academic reputation had changed significantly. And I knew that there was a strong interest by the college, particularly Dennis, the trustees, that we need to align ourselves—we use athletics to image the institution in a lot of ways. And we wanted to make sure, obviously you are the company that you keep. So we felt more aligned with schools in the Metro Atlantic Athletic conference, which is the conference that I had just come from with Iona. So I was fortunate enough to lead the college into the new conference, which I think aligned us more with you know Fairfield which was a competitor, Loyola College in Baltimore which was a competitor, and you know Manhattan.

GN: Siena.

TM: Siena and so on. Those schools were more consistent in terms of institutional mission.

GN: They had bene there some time

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TM: Yeah. So that was a big step for us. But we still struggled with getting the basketball success that we think we can. Which I know we can.

GN: On the subject of advancement just to spread it out a little. The women's basketball took a gigantic step in those years. You were here when you went all...well not all the way, but heck, sixteen. [Laughs].

TM: It was challenging because when I returned, Ken Babino was the woman's coach and McGarity was the men's coach and I had worked for Dave, he hired me, he gave me my first position. So obviously the job was to assess and evaluate those folks. And probably two or three years into my tenure, the decision was made to make a change with our women's program. It was very difficult because Ken Babino was just a gentleman and you know. But again it wasn't, we weren't getting the success that I thought.

GN: You stayed with Colgate we wanted to move up a little bit.

TM: Yeah, yeah. So we made a change and we hired a young lady name of Chris Lamb, who was by that time, she was an assistant at program and at that time she was an assistant at Duquesne, and she was actually Geno Auriemma's, the head coach at UCONN, first recruit when he got to UCONN to start building his dynasty as we all knew. So, Chris was, did a nice job. We were still building the infrastructure of our women's program. The men's program had had a big jolt in terms of its resources in the mid-80s. But the women's program lagged behind, in light of Title IX and in those interests, we were, we were really emphasizing a lot on the women's side, so just in terms of office space, practice time, coaching salary, and so on. We built that through the three years I believe Chris was our coach. And when we made a change with Chris Lamb, I felt that the program, with its infrastructure was in really good shape. It had what it needed to be successful, in addition to a new conference. And that's when we made the

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decision to hire Brian Georges, which was an interesting decision because a lot of people, I would say the majority of the people said, wow that's a mistake.

GN: Never worked in college, bringing him on board...

TM: Exactly. Doesn't know how to recruit, so on. And you know again I remember my first conversation with Brian was at Capulus up in Arlington. And you know I said Brian, if you accept this job, you will be the best coach in the league on the first day that you're the coach. But you have to be more than just a good coach in this league, you have to have good players. And he agreed. And you know I said Brian that's got to be an area that has to be of utmost importance and focus, cause I know you can coach, that's the easy part for you. And he agreed and he's done a wonderful job recruiting young ladies that get it.

GN: Just as a sidebar, he came out of Ohio? What is his home base?

TM: Actually no, I mean he came out of Syracuse, New York, in that area, and he came down here and got a teaching job at Lords. And was at Lords for I think twenty-six years when we hired him here.

GN: Wonderful Coach, I mean he did basketball, football...

TM: Fascinating, Gus, because he coached the women's volleyball, women's tennis, baseball.

GN: Not only coached, won many trophies.

TM: Oh, listen every team he coach, won like a state title.

GN: I remember reading an article...

TM: Yeah, It's like he had this golden touch that anything that he touched, he won. And he was a hell of an athlete up in the Syracuse area as a high school player. I believe he went to Cortland for his undergrad, which is a very athletic-based school, and was competitive there. Came to lords and actually taught my wife health, health or chemistry maybe...

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GN: They're all the same [laughs]

TM: Teaching. And I knew Brian, I knew Brian when I coached here, spent some time with him. And again I thought he was a terrific women's basketball coach. And he had his women's team at Lord's the Number 4th ranked team in the country.

GN: Boy, yeah that's amazing. Little town like, I mean he doesn't recruit from there, local kids are playing there. No I said that I thought some of the girls came out of Ohio that he had roots there.

TM: Well it's interesting and I'm sorry I didn't finish. His family, mom and dad moved from Syracuse, New York area to Ohio. So the connection for the players I think came about from the relationship that he developed visiting his parents.

GN: It must be a hard decision coming back to the local campus. We talked about the great strides that we've made academically really and reputation. You didn't mention campus which you know, put us next to Iona and you have to blush, you know, excuse me Iona. The-- Dennis will tear those buildings down the day he got there, and I don't want to go there so much. How do you make decisions or get involved in if it is, or maybe it's just the board...to put a new baseball field in, to put a new football field in, to put a stadium in you know, there's some kind of necessary internal dynamics, and you must lead some of it, if not all of it.

TM: Well yeah the interesting story...when I came back as athletic director one of the first meetings that I attended was with the Buildings and Grounds Committee. And if you remember at the time, Jack Gartland was the chair

GN: It was the most important committee on campus.

TM: It sure was. And you know I really enjoyed talking to Jack, whether it be at the meeting or offline. And he was actually, he was part of the interview process when I was hired as Athletic

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Director. I went to that first meeting and they were talking about building a football stadium. Which was terrific. But again, having only been on campus for days, I asked that if we could just allow me the opportunity to assess where we're at, and where our needs are athletically. And Dennis said okay fine, and Jack said fine. I think it was a couple weeks later that I went back in and I basically said part of my role here is not only Division I athletics but it's also clubs and intramurals, and general student recreation. And it was...cause I knew how much they wanted to have a stadium for football, but I said I got to be honest, I think our needs here are to help our students, and we need facilities that are going to be able to be used by Division I athletes but at the same time be used by students because they're our customer, and obviously everyone agreed. Because at the time we didn't have a weight room. We were using a racquetball court for a weight room.

GN: We lost a few racquetball courts along the way [laughs]

TM: We did, yes. But we were using racquetball courts with like two benches. And I was like, well, having a football field would be great for football but they really don't have anywhere to train. And then the other thing that's important with student athletes is to give them to opportunity is to provide them support, academic support, and we didn't really have an academic center either, a place where kids could go if they needed some assistance. So I said we need that as well. We're really operating our training program out of a footlocker. You know it was a 10 by 10 space where Glen Marinelli was. So we really have some needs that instead of focusing on just those 110 at that time football players need to think about a facility and an expansion of a facility that's gonna serve not only the athletes and not only the kids that were participating club, but all of our students. And that's really where we came up with the expansion of McCann. And we put football on hold, and now 20 years later we have it.

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GN: And the baseball field as well, in between.

TM: The baseball field was actually completed in '91...well I guess, uh, the season, the field was finished I think in '93, we started baseball in '91, and we played on the North Field if you remember, and they put uh...we played on the North Field, and the right field had a 30 foot chain link fence, because it was only about, I don't know...

GN: 200 feet?

TM: Yeah it was a very short port there, it was a really unique field. And um, it wasn't until we finished the baseball field up by McCann, that the team moved from the North Field up to McCann, and then we started varsity softball.

GN: That was uh...yeah I'm glad you mentioned all of that cause this is part of the unknown story. I mean about the need for the underdevelopment part of it. Now one thing you didn't mention but I got it from Deb uh...

TM: DiCaprio?

GN: DiCaprio when interviewing her about it, I said, we have a big athletic facility, do the students get a chance to use it? Oh yeah... they go at 2 o'clock in the morning sometimes and Well I'm not around at 2 o'clock in the morning you know. [Laughs] So I don't know the lights are on and that there's a big machine you're working 24 hours a day or something. I know they're coming back from drinking. I mean the athletes for those who want to participate, there's an opportunity. And also the exercise room, I mean you don't see them at Mike Arteaga's. But you come over here I mean there's an opportunity there's a whole new thinking to allow the students to participate in the athletic program and I think that was uh

TM: We are a little unique in that Gus, you know in terms of the way we've done that. There's only one facility that we've built in my 20 years for athletics that's not shared by all of campus.

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And that's the new basketball building, which is exclusively for men's and women's basketball in the back of McCann. But everything else that we've done, whether it's the tennis courts, whether it's the turf field, whether it's McCann expansion, you know our weight room. We have a terrific weight room, but it's not exclusive to Division I athletes. It's open to all of our students, as it should be. And you know the cardio room upstairs in McCann is open to all students. So I think we're very unique in that regard.

GN: Okay let's change the focus a little bit and talk about, you've been here for this tremendous growth. I give this little presentation about you know, when I graduated from here, it was a very small farm, you know. And when I give this presentation about the history of development of Marist. How did this happen? In my lifetime, there's been such a dramatic change on campus, the name of the Marist, first of all the change from Marian to Marist, there was a change in the population of the students. There are more women here now than men. To whom, how do you explain this? I guess you would say you know Dennis Murray would play a leading role in it, but he's not the only one. He is principle. I saw a statistic the other day that just blew my mind. There's 39,000 graduates at Marist I think now. 92% got their diplomas from Dennis. Well yeah but Paul Ambrose had four in the graduating class. I was in the third graduating class and we had 15. You know so, it takes a long time to get to 100 when you're doing this, you know. And then, you know, Paul finishes and Linus comes on, that's another story, about the growth and development of the Linus, the dormitories, the changing from just being a local college here now to east of the Hudson to Long Island and the Bronx, we didn't even cross the Hudson for the most part. But that all changed. So, from your perspective, Dennis of course has to take the lead role and he does. What else are the influences that...I'm sure, the coaches, the faculty, the Marist tradition, the hotel, we're 72 miles from one of the biggest cities in the world, that has to have

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something to do with it. A lot of Marist schools down there, at least there were in those days. But how would you see it?

TM: Well, I don't know, maybe this is a little unique. But what I see in Marist is I think you have Dennis Murray who has been an incredible leader, there's no question. And I think anybody you ask that same question is going to respond that way. But he's not in the trenches. I think what he's had is he's had an incredible ability to hire the right people. They understand what he wants, and they work extremely hard to get there. You know I mean the fact that he's had such great senior leadership in terms of John Lehey who was here., who's now at Quinnipiac, and Tony Senara and uh... there's five out there

GN: The academic leaders, Mark Vanderhayden.

TM: Yeah Mark Vanderhayden. They served long tenures here and they did a terrific job in the trenches. The other one, Roy Merolli, who served for many years, people wanted to work for them. It's like a good coach, you want to play for that coach. You wanted to play for Roy. And the other gentleman Mark Sullivan, who we forget but Mark...

GN: This is where I say rose. Four of them became presidents at other colleges.

TM: I was on campus because I was single and so on and I remember popping into Mark Sullivan's office at 10 o'clock at night and he's in there grinding it out, you know what I mean just as Roy Merolli did. And then there's a lot of other people, if you look at the tenure of people who work at Marist, they stay a long time. I don't think we have a huge staff. We're not

GN: Loaded in that area.

TM: No we're not all. We've run very lean. We've run with the right people, and the right leadership. And I think that, the people have really made this place what it is. And you know I only have a 10, to 20, 25 year perspective. But I'm sure it was the same back in the day, the 50's

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and 60's, people who were desperately committed to Marist and its growth. We've been able to sustain that, and I think that's why we've had had such incredible growth. I mean there's a real sense of pride of people who go to school here and who work here, at least in athletics.

GN: Well I think academically, I mean uh I have students who have their children coming here, if they can get in. That's the other thing. I probably couldn't get in here now, much less teach here.

TM: [Laughs] I don't know about that.

GN: As I look around, and I...there's certainly we have more students with the various kind of renowned scholarships upon leaving here, Fulbright's and the other kinds of things. We used to have one and now we're getting five. That's national competition. So I think that's certainly a part of it.

TM: Well and I'm proud, because a couple of weeks ago, I moved my daughter in, my oldest daughter, so she's a student here at Marist as well.

GN: Well, she's gonna suffer a little bit [Laughs]. What was the economy of the times? I talked to LeMorte one time on this interview and I asked him to make the comparison, and he did it by, when he came here, there was one senior who had a car, and it looked like it was dangled by a train two or three times. Now the freshmen have cars that he couldn't afford to have. Using that symbol, okay now that they have cars on campus I guess, nevertheless, they have access to the cars, so the votes have gone up because of the tide economically and all the rest of that plays a part in it..

TM: I also think that Marist has done a really good job with pricing. Our competition are schools that we feel we're as good as or better academically, but they're charging 15 or 16,000 dollars more.