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- S1 00:08 Welcome to the Sports Medicine podcast brought to you by the Sydney & J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine & Human Performance in the Department of Health & Kinesiology at Texas A&M University. At the Huffines Institute, we're always working to facilitate, apply, and bring you the most up-to-date coverage of the wide world that is Sports Medicine & Human Performance, all in the language you can understand and share with your friends. And now here's our host, the director of the Huffines Institute, Dr. Tim Lightfoot.
- S2 00:37 Hello and welcome to the weekly addition of Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine & Human Performance's podcast. I'm your host Tim Lightfoot and I want to thank you all for taking the time to download and listen. Every week we bring you another interesting person in the world of sports medicine and human performance and general health and other kind of topics as well. This week is no exception. We have Ms. Lydia Dubisson here with us today.
- S3 00:59 That works. [laughter]
- S2 01:00 Welcome to the podcast, Lydia.
- S3 01:02 Thank you. I appreciate you inviting me.
- S2 01:13 Yeah, it's great. Let me tell the audience a little bit about why you're here, who you are, and then we'll just jump into the conversation. Lydia has a bachelor and a masters degree in Sports Management from Texas A&M University. She is currently an assistant instructor and professor here at Texas A&M in the undergraduate sports management program. She has an extensive sports background and history. She has worked sensibly in radio and television in Los Angeles County in California. She was a sports director for a news organization out there. She worked as an anchor, reporter, and a shooter for area sports. I'm sure that's a camera person and not a regular shooter. I'll have to be careful with the terminology there.
- S3 01:38 That's right. [chuckles] Although I did use to compete for it in riflery when I was a kid so technically I've been a shooter too.
- S2 01:46 She taught Science PE in Anita Oaks Middle School in California. She was the first woman in school history at Texas A&M to receive a football letter as a manager for the football team from 1992 to 1996. Interestingly enough, and we're going to start with this. She was an assistant football coach for Grover Cleveland High School in California, teaching linebackers, kickers, and punters as well as strength and conditioning. I hope the audience caught that. She was the coach, one of the coaches. And on that note, she also has a participation background, she was a linebacker and a special team's player with the LA Lazars in the Women's American Football League.
- S3 02:28 And also the Houston Energy, which I'm not sure if I actually updated my resume there.
- S2 02:33 Wow, so that's really impressive. You played for multiple teams.
- S3 02:36 Two different teams, over the years.
- S2 02:38 So let's just start with that. We'll get to the sports management stuff because there's an academic reason that you're here, of course.
- S3 02:43 Sure, I hope so. That's what I'm told. [chuckles]
- S2 02:47 Absolutely. It's very rare - as we were talking about earlier and we've talked about before - it's very rare to have a woman that's in football as participant. I'm

not sure how many people have heard of the Women's American Football League.

S3 02:58

Well, there's actually several different leagues. There's a lot of changes and I probably - I'm a little guilty of not updating the specifics - when I played for that team, it was probably that and that league may still exist. There's actually a number of different women's leagues, so there's quite a lot of women who are participating in what's called and considered Women's Professional Football and they have been for a long time. I personally know the roots go back to before 1999 because I played then in 19-- no, 2000, I believe it was the first time. And then I played for the Houston Energy, which is now in another league and we've actually switched-- that team switched leagues since I played for it about three seasons ago. So, yeah, it's kind of an interesting thing. A lot of times when people hear about women's pro football, it's-- when I tell them that oftentimes it's probably the first time I've heard about it even though there are a lot of leagues and a lot of teams across different leagues. And so there's women that play probably in most of the states, I would say.

S2 04:00

Now this is serious football we're talking about. There are - for lack of better term - joke leagues. You see the [lint?] lingerie league out there and some other things. This was serious football though.

S3 04:10

Yeah, this is real woman playing real football. It's just women playing against women. There's really no difference. They do make the ball slightly smaller to accommodate the hand size difference, what ends up happening there is you get quite a lot of long bombs and everything else that you might see if you're just watching men out there playing so it's same thing. It's just women playing women.

S2 04:33

So what got you into playing football? We don't normally think of that as a women sport.

S3 04:37

But, yeah, more partially because it's not [chuckles] necessary common knowledge that there's women that play it. There are a lot, now that people realize that and maybe modifies the question a little but how I got involved-- oh goodness, it's all interrelated. I guess since hearing my resume there, you know that I was an equipment manager at A&M in the '90s. I started here in 1992 when I started school in Texas A&M. That's where I got involved in football, fell in love with football. And so the rest of my life of all the different things that I do, there's always kind of been that pivotal area that revolves around football. Whether I'm doing something in it full time, volunteering or whatever it is, there's always some aspect of football that's in my life. So, I fell in love with football then and when I moved out to Los Angeles, I was doing one of my jobs in television because I worked in TV behind the scenes as well when I worked in California. I did a lot of different things out there. That was one of them. And I remember one of our camera guys said something to me about, "Did you hear there were some tryouts for a women's team coming up?" And I said, "No, I didn't." I looked - and that was probably back in 1999 - and sure enough there was tryouts coming up and I said, 'I have an opportunity to play the sport that I love so much, heck , yeah.' [chuckles] So I went and I did it, and I played that year. And so that's kind of a long story short, but that's how I got involved with playing. When I came back to Texas, I moved back the end of '06 and started working at A&M. The spring of '07, I started teaching here. Several years in I kind of got situated. My life sort of had a pattern for a change, and I said to myself, 'You know, I'd kind of like to play one more time or at least give it a shot again and kind of see.' So I found that there's actually multiple teams in Houston, and so--

S2 06:32

Really?

S3 06:33 Yeah. That was the closest drive for me being here in College Station. So I tried out, made the team, and I ended up playing there one more time. Then after that I just decided to hang it up and retire from playing, although one never knows what opportunities in coaching may come about down the road.

S2 06:50 Right. So part of this was that you have coached high school football in California and the question arises, did you get much flack? Were you accepted as a coach?

S3 07:01 Yeah, often I get that question. I kind of utilize it to--

S2 07:05 Sorry, I'm asking the obvious questions here. [laughter]

S3 07:07 No, that's one of the most common questions that I do get when people find out that I coached high school football. I utilize it in my communications class. We talk about the concept of hegemony. I ask them, "What do you think the first question is or most common question I get when people ask me about my coaching?" And oftentimes it's, "Well, how did the boys receive you?" Which is basically, if you break that down, why would they accept a female coach for a bunch of guys. It's kind of funny. I understand where we are in the day and age where it's not that common for a female to coach a man's sport in general, let alone, football. But logically, it doesn't make sense if you're qualified to do something which you wouldn't do it regardless of gender. So, to me, I understand why people are asking that question but I think it's funny because I'll be in a classroom setting with males and females and I'll say, 'How many of you think it's strange that I'm your professor right now?'

S2 08:06 No one has a problem?

S3 08:08 Of course not. Nobody does. It's not unusual for a female to be your boss, or your teacher, or whatever. It's very normal.

S2 08:15 But 60 years ago now, that may have been a different response.

S3 08:17 Right, right. In the timeline when it comes to football, I get it. There's not that many women who-- if you take just sport alone, there's not very many women who coach men's teams even where it's excessively logical. I happened to be in love with football and I happened to have it in my life in some aspect or another, and that ended up translating into meeting an individual who happened to be a high school coach and didn't have those conflicts of gender. Why can't you do something if you're fully capable of doing it? Which I very much appreciate from who ended up being my head coach. And then when I ended up going to varsity-- I coached a year of JV, two years of varsity. And then his brother was my DC and we had several other coaches that were great together and it was fantastic. So I definitely give those guys credit for not wondering about that. They see, 'Hey, you've got potential to be a great coach. We know you're a great coach and we've appreciated what you've done,' and they've told me that numerous times. I appreciate that mentality because I understand it's not a normal thing but if you just put it in a logic perspective, there's no reason I shouldn't be coaching.

S2 09:31 Do you have professional football experience as well as love of the game?

S3 09:36 Well, let's see, I've got loads of college. I was four years equipment manager on the football team here. A bunch of my guys went on to play professional sports. A lot of coaches I worked for went on to be head coaches, pro coaches over and so on. Those were the guys I learned from and that was in the '90s. If you recall in that era in the 90s, we had up to -- we had often times what was the number one defense in the country. So I learned from guys who both played and coached, the number one defense in the country at the linebacker position. That's where I learned football. That's what I saw every day. In fact, I utilized that as a foundation for everything that-- when I went to coach, I knew what

things should look like because I'd seen it done perfectly all the time. When it wasn't being done that way, I had a good reference point. So I could figure out why isn't it being done that way and let's figure out what causes something to look right and to be right and to be executed properly, and then figuring out those foundations, and then being able to create that in players. That was a very, very, useful experience. I don't have-- other than the XFL, I did work with the XFL for a year on the sidelines. There was only one year or so, a 100% of the existence of the XFL. [laughter]

- S2 10:51 There you go. You worked throughout the whole history of the XFL.
- S3 10:53 The whole history of the XFL. Yeah, there's some fun stories with that too but-- so that was my, I guess you could say, my pro experience. I've done a lot of things. I'm pausing because I'm actually thinking about stuff that I didn't put on my resume. Sometimes, I just do stuff and I don't think about putting it on my resume and so I almost forget. So pro, no. College, very good, yes.
- S2 11:16 So you're still open to coaching positions if there were one come available some place?
- S3 11:20 Yeah, yeah. Definitely.
- S2 11:21 If anybody's listening and you're looking for a coach, we have one for you.
- S3 11:25 Yeah, I would prefer to specialize in linebackers. The thing about me is-- everybody has their aspirations and what not. A lot of people want to be coordinators. They want to be head coaches or whatever, and oftentimes I'll get that question. People jump straight to head coach. I'm like, 'Why do you just assume somebody wants to be a head coach?' I guess because lots of people do. But for me and what I love doing, I like to focus on something and do it very well. I'm actually very happy being a position coach. I absolutely love the position of linebackers. Now I can coach inside or outside linebackers. Some people might consider that almost two position, but I would be happy just being a position coach. I don't say 'just', that's a very important position. But that's what I enjoy, that's where I'm good at, that's what I like doing. I have no problems doing that. I have no desire to be a coordinator or a head coach.
- S2 12:14 So over the - while we're here and we'll talk about the linebacker position - over the last 20 years that you've been involved because you've been involved in LA football for at least 20 years, how has that position morphed? Especially with the new spread offenses that are coming. Of course, we're going some place we didn't expect to go on this interview but that's okay.
- S3 12:31 Yeah. I will try to answer that in a nutshell because anytime you get me into an analysis of football, we're talking about-- you would be having me in here for about 20 years.[chuckles]
- S2 12:42 Well, we can do multiple podcasts. That's okay.
- S3 12:45 We can just do football analysis podcast.
- S2 12:47 There you go.
- S3 12:48 That would work. We could cover a lot of time with that. Generally, when people ask me questions like that, I preface it with 'Do you want the in-depth analysis because it usually is long?' Let me put it in a nutshell. Over the past 20 years, what happened in addressing the linebackers scenarios specifically, we have come more to a phase where we're doing the spread stuff and a lot of pass stuff and all that. There's a lot of in-depths of reasons for why that is so let me just stick with 'That's what happened.'
- S3 13:21 The changes I have occurred on defense because of that is a lot of people - I guess for lack of better word - are a bit scared of that pass. And so, linebackers

have really started to kind of drop back more, as I would say from a fundamental perspective, drop back on their heels a lot more. They've really gotten more into kind of a pass support scenario which, I'll be honest, I'm not very happy about that because I believe linebackers should back the line. Crazy, crazy, concept, right? But that should be the job first when I coach fundamentally stopping upfront stuff; the run, dealing with blockers, things like that that are very trench-oriented.

S3 14:09 You don't have time to hesitate. You don't even have time to take a false step. And that's something actually I gained from-- one of the coaches I worked with was Phil Bennett, he's now of course the defensive coordinator at Baylor. And Coach Bennett, I can't say enough good things about him. I got a chance to worked with him in my senior year. I stayed in contact with him over the years so when I was coaching high school football, I would go to him and I would meet with him on my visits back to Texas.

S3 14:37 One piece of advice I give anybody, when a busy person speaks - and somebody who you admire and you know knows their stuff - when they speak, you listen. It's only going to be one little thing they might have time to tell you. And one of the things he told me was no false steps. So I built my entire-- I guess everything I ever do, I always would analyse that no false steps. If you take that perspective then, I realized how important it was that that very first movement be-- it's completely necessary. But one of the problems that I see a lot with backers being back on their heels - we're very concerned about the pass - is you have false steps that are built in. You have people who are already out of their basic position, if you will, their stance.

S3 15:22 Stance is, you live and die by stances as linebacker. I would [?] a lot of positions but I always specifically address linebackers. You live and die by your stances. If you're already rocked back on your heel, there's going to be a false step. You're also going to be ready to do something that's going to cause you to be out of your proper basic stance because you're probably thinking you're going to go backwards or something.

S2 15:46 You're going to be backpedaling to cover something across the middle or something.

S3 15:47 Right. But really you don't have time to adjust to something that's in your face, that has to be your first commitment. And I find - and there's probably some people out there who would argue with me because of course there's always different philosophies - I find I have more time for my guys to recover for a pass than I do for a run. That's why they're line backers. They're not secondary frontiers. I kind of jokingly and I'll go ahead and throw this out there. This is a phrase I've coined almost half joking but it's sort of true. What I've said is there's-- that the common game, this whole passing, this spread thing and a lot people's adjustments being, 'Oh, let's drop them back. Let's give cushion'. All this running away stuff - getting backers on your heels - has created basically made linebackers into secondary players. So when I'm being at my harshest and my frustrations of the changing of the game currently, is that I'll call them secondary and so I'll say what we have now is linemen, a secondary and a tertiary.

S2 16:56 Right, all three levels.

S3 16:58 Right, so there's those three levels but it's not at the same capacity it was when you had more of the, either balanced or in your face, punch you on the mouth type of football where people were moving forward. That's actually a condensed version of your question. That's why I almost preface it with, "You want me to answer that question?"

S2 17:20 We're really in an era now when it's-- we're in one of those cyclic phases when

the offense really is dictating what the defense has to do, because if the defense played the traditional way-- you talked about Baylor and Art Briles is really known for spreading the field way out and really putting the line backers out on islands as well as what we call the secondary now. Given your terms, the tertiary. So, in effect, the defensive schemes have to react to what the offense is doing.

S3 17:46

Well, I would actually somewhat disagree with that.

S2 17:49

Well, that's fine. That's why we have a good conversation.

S3 17:52

Exactly. This is one reason-- as you well know we could-- there's a white board behind you just to let people understand where we're sitting. There's this massive white board. We could crack out the markers and have a blast with this conversation. But this is one of those places where when I have discussions with people and we differ on this, this is where we start to break off. My philosophy is much more of in your face, I'd rather take big risk being physical than I would be giving you a cushion and letting guys who can run really, really, really fast. Run in known patterns in a straight line in front of my guys. I don't like that at all. My philosophy is that, from a defensive perspective, is that we dictate to offense what we want them to do. So when you say why is this offense kind of dictating? Well, that's what happen to a lot of people. I don't particularly agree with that, that offense should dictate to defense. My philosophy is, first and foremost, the defense should dictate to offense what it gets to do. So everything that I say is comes out of that philosophy. I can understand when I have conversations with people who come from that perspective, just kind of understand we're coming from different places on that. So I had a really round about discussion like this. I always have a great time with this. I'd love talking like this. I love football analysis, it's so much fun for me.

S3 19:12

I had this discussion in an extensive version of this discussion with an individual who was at one point a receivers coach at an Ivy League school. We just had a blast. We loved it. We were start arguing defense [and skill?], well here I got an offensive guy arguing with me about what defense I should do. Think about what my job was? My job was to stop these guys. So it's fun how he was telling me, 'Well, but you got to this and this.' And he's coming from a perspective, 'You have to figure out how to stop us in our patterns and our this. These are all our strengths.' We went off for a long, long time and then I jokingly came to the end of it where everything I would say, of course, he was arguing with because we're kind of different perspective on it. My best argument really ended up being this, "How's that been working out for you?"

S2 20:02

For you. [chuckles]

S3 20:03

Right? Because if you-- all the stuff he's saying is what people are doing. But yet, we have some really, really high scoring games these days. If you think about that, my best answer, 'Okay, how is that working out for you?'

S2 20:20

What I think I saw, I forgot which team it was, but they were averaging - it's a college game - 18.8 points a game and they're ranked-- they're 111th in the country out of 132 Division I schools or whatever. So to think that averaging 18 points a game puts you at 111th in the country, there's a lot of scoring going on.

S3 20:40

Yeah, there is a lot of scoring going on. And there's also a lot of people are dropping back. What's interesting is when you want to attack defenses, the big difference that now-- you're seeing when there's a defensive line that are really good at what they do, they stand out. People like them and end up paying them a lot of money. And there's a reason for that because they get back there, they get in the pastor's business, and they mix things up and all that stuff. They also draw a lot of blockers, which keep guys off of the current linebackers who have a hard time dealing with blockers because there's not a lot of time spent on how

do you deal with blockers. There's a lot of basics behind that fundamental and it's very, very important. So if your linebackers - if you do run - and your linebackers are going to get blocked out every time, you're going to be moving the ball four or five yards every single run play. Gee, what's happening in the current environment?

S2 21:36

A lot more than that.

S3 21:37

Interesting. If you look at-- if you do your analysis, you can find lots of teams who move the ball that much. Well, if you can move the ball four or five yards on every run play--

S2 21:48

Most coaches would take that.

S3 21:51

Well, not a lot of them do it nearly enough because there-- because it doesn't score lots and lots and lots of points, right? But it does control clock and it does keep other good offenses off the field. I wonder where that's been happening. Interesting. If you do have a high potent offense, you don't want them on the field-- your opponent.

S2 22:08

And again you talk about that, of course, let's just call it out for what it is. Last couple of weeks as we've played, our Texas A&M has played, our offenses has been limited by just what you're talking about the big defense of linemen that are getting in the face of the quarterback and allowing the linebackers to run free where they're supposed to be.

S3 22:26

Yeah. Like I said, it's a very, very long discussion. We could talk about this for days straight because for one thing I say, you've got ten more questions and then I can explain that and there's ten more of that and so forth and so on.

S2 22:39

But that's why this is part one of this podcast.

S3 22:42

[chuckles] Apparently, it's going to--

S2 22:43

And in part two that we'll record at some other point, we'll talk about sports management which is your academic area that you're here. For a few minutes we have remaining, let's talk about sports management for a second.

S3 22:54

Okay.

S2 22:54

Actually, your experiences have given you a unique perspective to bring to students in Sports Management.

S3 23:00

I hope so.

S2 23:01

And so, tell us about that a little bit and what kind of classes you teach, what are the big concepts that you give your students? I'm asking you to summarize all your classes in three minutes.

S3 23:11

There you go. [chuckles] One of the reasons why-- actually, the big reason why I was brought here to Texas A&M teach is because of that eclectic background in sports that I have. As you read off there, I do have radio experience, television experience. I've coached. I've played. I have to think down the list. I've pretty much have done everything in football except referee, which I've no desire to do by the way.

S2 23:37

Right. No, it's a little thankless job there.

S3 23:42

Yeah, it is. But interestingly, an area that the NFL is supportive of women getting more involved in and I will.

S2 23:47

Really?

S3 23:48

Yeah. You should do a little bit of a search on that. I was surprised to find that out recently. There's women on the way who are doing more and more referring

which will surprise you. You should do a check on it and I would encourage everybody to do that because it's something I recently found out. You think I would know stuff like this but I have no desire in referring, but more power to the women out there who are doing it. So I have a lot of eclectic experience. That was largely what put me on the radar because I was also teaching along the way, and I ended up teaching everything from Junior High through Community College. When you mixed up my sports background with the fact that I am a teacher, and that I was doing a lot of teaching, I was realizing that I like teaching. I really enjoy this. The time I was hired, I was working full-time in television, I was a Sports Director for that little TV station out there in California, which for anybody that knows that area, Palmdale, Lancaster, is the area where I was at. And I was teaching at Community College to supplement my income because you don't get paid a lot in small time television. I know some people here in Sports Management, and they saw what I was doing and they liked the fact that I had this teaching expertise going on and I was getting better at that. And so when the job popped open, it seemed perfect for me because how many people have had that bizarre of an eclectic background but are also teachers. This position is very uniquely, almost great for me. Largely that's why I was brought on here was because I have experience and because I'm a teacher. That's why I work with undergraduates and I was brought on for that purpose of teaching undergraduate classes which I love, absolutely love.

S2 25:37 But if there were assistant linebacker and coaching position some place, you would consider that option?

S3 25:42 Teaching and coaching are two things I do love. Coaching is teaching. It's in a different setting. And teaching, I guess you could say, is coaching. It's just in a different setting. I could see doing something like that simultaneously. Long story short, it also depends on the crew that you work with. The guys that I worked for, I would love to work for again. I jokingly told my old head coach, he loves high school like, "Craig, why won't you just jump on board the community college. We've been doing this conversation a few times. Craig, all of us can go, we could teach college and we could coach," so I'm only half joking about that, but it's really not about just coaching. It's coaching with the right people too, so that's a big deal. Going back to that original question-- so now, I teach a lot of different classes. I do have some Marketing background which we didn't really talk about and it's in my vitae, but I used to be in Television and Radio Sales and Advertising. I have that background. I've always enjoyed that aspect too. And then of course the sports background and the broadcasting. So I have ended up teaching-- I would say I specialize in Marketing and Communications also. I teach Sport Marketing classes with regularity-- Sport Communication with absolute regularity. I'm the only one who teaches that class in undergraduate here. I do research writing seminars and I'm kind of a utility player at times. I might teach foundations class. I might teach management class, just kind of what needs to be taught. I can teach a variety. I've got a little bit of background in essentially everything now.

S2 27:21 And we need utility players.

S3 27:23 Yeah. [chuckles]

S2 27:23 Always, always. Lydia, it has been pleasure to have you on today. We've--

S3 27:28 Thank you.

S2 27:28 -- actually talked about areas that I didn't anticipate we were going to talk about.

[chuckles]

S2 27:32 And as we always do with our guest, we're going to give you an opportunity to

give us a take home message. What do you want people to remember from this podcast? Other than the fact that it might be the first of many.

S3 27:41

[chuckles] Yeah. Well, I suppose I should get to something deeper. I was recently asked to guest teach in a class about coaching philosophy. Coaching philosophy, I think really my people, my life philosophy too but anybody considering going into teaching and coaching or positions where you're guiding people and bring them along is to really care about people. That person's life is very important and to keep in mind that it's really about them. It can be very easy to get caught up in, 'But I want to do this, but I want to do that,' but remember the people that you're working with. And life is really about the betterment of them and their lives. I guess I would just encourage everybody to be people-oriented. And definitely, those going into coaching and teaching, just realize that first and foremost thing should be your students. It should be your athletes as people, as human beings because it can be easy to get caught up in everything else but that's really the focal point.

S2 28:48

Cool, good message. Thank you for being here today.

S3 28:50

Thank you for having me.

S2 28:51

I enjoy in having you here today. And I want to take the opportunity to thank all of you that have been listening. Our regular listeners know that at this time we have our podcast question of the week and here with our podcast question of the week is our producer Kelli.

S4 29:04

What is the one problem that has evolved in the way linebackers play?

S2 29:09

And so that's the question of the week. Be the first one to send us the correct answer to Huffines podcast at hlkn.tamu.edu. You will win one of those nifty podcast t-shirts that we've got. So again, don't think it's too late to respond so respond. When you got the answer, you will get one of those t-shirts. Lydia, thanks again for being with us today.

S3 29:31

Thank you.

S2 29:31

We enjoyed it. And again, thank you all for taking your time to download us and listen. We hope that you join us next week when we have another interesting person in the world of Sports Medicine & Human Performance. Until next week, we want you to stay active and healthy.

S1 29:45

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