

George Perles

February 7, 2001

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Wednesday, February 7, the year 2001. We're in East Lansing, Michigan. I'm Jeff Charnley, along with Fred Honhart, interviewing Coach George Perles for the MSU Oral History Project for the university's sesquicentennial to be commemorated in the year 2005.

Coach Perles, you can see that we'd like to tape-record this interview. Do you give us permission to tape?

Perles: Certainly. Everything's fine.

Charnley: I'd like to start with some general description of your growing-up years and family life. Where were you born and raised, and where did you go to school before college?

Perles: I was born and raised on the west side of Detroit, Vernon Central, and lived in an apartment, 7728 Pitt. It's hard to forget. It was a one-bedroom apartment. I didn't have any brothers or sisters. My bedroom was the living room in the Murphy bed. We always had enough to eat. My father worked at the Ford Rusch [phonetic] plant, and was a badge checker and then later on became a clerk in the office.

I went to Detroit Western High School, which is located on Scotten [phonetic] and Verner [phonetic] Highway, very close to the Cadillac Motorcar Company at that time. When I was a

junior, my parents moved to Allen Park, Michigan, but I continued to go to Detroit Western High School and finished up there.

ad a good life as a child, always had the basics, food, clothes, and my dad always worked. My mother stayed at home and raised me.

Charnley: Did you have any extended family, important influences in your life, besides your parents?

Perles: I had an uncle by the name of Ben that was a big influence, probably motivated me to play sports, all kinds of sports, football, hockey, baseball, and a cousin named Joe Romaine [phonetic] that was also somewhat of an influence. My father wasn't much of an athlete, but he did enjoy watching sports. He took me to Tiger baseball games. He took me to see the Detroit Redwings play and took me to see boxing matches. He was a fan more than an athlete, and we enjoyed those things together.

Charnley: You mentioned some of the sports that you played in high school. Which one did you like best?

Perles: I thought I was going to be a professional baseball player. Baseball was the leading sport, the national pastime. Football was just starting. Professional football wasn't much. College football was very, very good, but professional football was not very successful. It was in the starting years. I always did tell my mother, "Some day I'm going to play professional baseball and make 50,000 a year and drive a black Cadillac." Those were the things that I thought were

material-wise very important. In those days, \$50,000 was as much or more than any baseball player was making, and a black Cadillac was the premier car at that time.

Charnley: What position did you play in baseball?

Perles: Baseball, I was a catcher. But I could pitch. I could play third base. Had played high school baseball, American Legion baseball, Detroit Firemen midget's baseball. Then in the summer, with the different teams, I might play on three different teams, playing all the time. My whole interest as a youngster was sports and math. Not very interested in English, but more of a math major, and athletics, especially athletics. Whatever the season was, I was in for it. Probably the worst sport was basketball, so instead of the winter playing basketball, I was a hockey player. Hockey took up the winter, summer was baseball, and the fall was football.

Charnley: So you played all those sports during high school?

Perles: Yes, yes.

Charnley: Were any of your coaches influential on you at that time?

Perles: Yes, my high school football coach was Ed Rutherford. Eddie came to our school, Western High School, when I was a junior, and he was only about ten years older than we were. After I finished college and got into coaching, he was instrumental in getting me one of my positions, head

coaching job at St. Ambrose, which was located in Grosse Point Park. Then Eddie came up here to Michigan State as an assistant coach for [Hugh] Duffy Daugherty.

When I came back as assistant coach, I inherited Eddie as my administrative assistant. Eddie still lives down in Florida, and I'll see him in a couple of weeks. But he had a big, big influence on my life, and it was unique to play for him and then work with him.

I forgot to mention, I came back here at Michigan State as assistant coach and worked for Duffy and Eddie and I were assistants together. Then when I came back as head coach, he worked for me. So we went the whole 360 with your high school coach. It was very unusual and very close.

Charnley: Was there any characteristic about him as a coach that--you mentioned his youth, being not much older than you. Was there anything that you ultimately emulated?

Perles: He was a stern person that probably irritated a few people because he didn't have the capacity to exaggerate or lie. He told the truth. He was straight-up with people. He didn't try to flower it up. He was a straightforward, honest guy, and you had to respect that. There was no gray area with Eddie, and there still isn't. He said it the way it is. He lived by the rules. He used to have an old saying. "Just tell me what the rules are." Whatever the rules are, he'd abide by them.

Charnley: How was it that you ended up choosing Michigan State?

Perles: Well, I got out of high school, and I had some success in high school. I was an All-State football player for two years, junior and senior year, and had a chance to go to any school I wanted

in the country. I decided on going to University of Tennessee, which is something that's not very well known. I went to the University of Tennessee for six months and felt out of place, a long way from home. I'd never been far away from home.

I left there and came back home and went into the Army with fourteen other friends. We all moved our draft number up and went in with what at that time they called the buddy system, 1954. So fifteen of us went in together. They guaranteed that all fifteen of you would stay together in basic training. After basic training, the last year of my two-year commitment, I was stationed in Hawaii, Scofield Barracks.

I played football for the Army over in Hawaii. Duffy Daugherty, along with Bear Bryant and—I forget his name, but the old coach from Maryland, were on their way to Japan, doing a clinic. He stopped over in Honolulu and saw me, and knew about my playing days there in the Army and wanted me to come to Michigan State after I was discharged. So because of Duffy approaching me, because I still had my eligibility left, after finishing my two years in the service, the Army, I came to Michigan State on a football scholarship, and that was my connection, probably where I should have gone to start with, but Tennessee at that time had just come off eight years of Bowl games. It was a football factory, and I thought that I would enjoy that. I missed this environment.

Charnley: Were you surprised when you found out the Army had--that people could play football in the military?

Perles: No, I knew that they played, but I didn't know how about going out for it. When I got to Hawaii, they approached me and actually cut orders and directed me to play football. They knew

your record. They had the record of your high school and being a scholarship player at Tennessee. So they cut orders on me. I didn't have a choice, really, which I was thankful for. I went and played football over in Hawaii, and we had some success over there. It was probably a big help to go to Michigan State, although Duffy knew about me in high school. They had recruited me, but I decided to go to Tennessee.

Charnley: When did you get out of the service then?

Perles: I got out in March of '56. I went in in April '54. I got out three weeks early because I was in Hawaii. In those days, Hawaii was considered overseas, and so they couldn't time that perfectly. But I got out with three weeks early.

Charnley: Did you start in the fall?

Perles: Then I started Michigan State in '56, the fall of '56.

Charnley: How would you describe that first year?

Perles: I'd now been to Tennessee, which was the first break from home, and then I'd been in the Army for two years. So coming to Michigan State and only being an hour and a half, hour and forty-five minutes from home, that was easy.

Some of my friends had gone to Michigan State right out of high school, and so there were juniors and seniors on the team here that I played high school with. One of my friends, Joe

Carruthers [phonetic], him and I were teammates at Western High School, and he was playing here and just came off a Rose Bowl. Dan Curry [phonetic], a guy that was from the city of Detroit that I played against, was here. So coming here, playing football, was pretty easy because I'd been used to being away from home now. I knew our freshmen players because we were all in the same boat, but I knew a lot of varsity players or knew about them and they knew about me. So I had a lot of friends right off the bat.

Charnley: What was your position you played?

Perles: In those days, we went both ways. There was a single platoon, so I was an offensive tackle and a defensive tackle. My freshman coach was Doug Weaver, who later became athletic director here and who later hired me as head football coach.

Charnley: What do you remember about some of the early years in your own experience here at Michigan State?

Perles: I remember we had a freshman team with about two hundred players on it. This was a real football factory. You just don't start with hiring "Biggie" [Clarence] Munn in '47 and win a national championship in '52 without having super support from your president, your board of trustees, and spending a lot of scholarship money to get the best group of people together. That's exactly what Biggie Munn did from '47 to '52, he won the national championship. Then he gave up football after the '53 season because of a bleeding ulcer, and handed the position over to Duffy.

The schedule was, you came in as a freshman, played freshman football because the varsity, you weren't eligible. Then in the winter we had what we called a football class, a lab class where you put the full uniform on. We went over to Jenison Fieldhouse. It was a dirt floor and they turned it up. We had a five-credit class there where we went two hours, twice a week, and we got five credits. I was a Phys Ed major. We went in there and just like you would during fall practice, just knocked the heck out of each other.

Then after that, it was spring practice. I started on the freshman team. When I went up to the varsity, the first day I was thirteenth team. That's how many people we had. There were a lot of them behind me. By the end of spring practice, I had worked my way up to second team and broke a hand, and came back in the fall and started off on the third team. It took about three or four games before I started. Then near the end of the season then I had my knee injured, and that was the end of my football-playing career at Michigan State.

But this was great competition here. We had a lot of players and we had a lot of coaches and we had a lot of emphasis on it. President [John A.] Hannah had an idea that he could take a university, a college, ag school and a college, and have a great football team, get the publicity he needed and turn it into a university and a powerful school, which he did. I don't think you could do that anymore these days. But in those days, you could. The rules were different. They were a lot more lenient. You could do a lot more things than you can do now. You could have as many scholarships as you wanted, and Hannah wanted a great football team. He wanted the publicity from it. I've always felt that the foundation of the school, this particular school, is agriculture and football, in my opinion which isn't worth a hoot, but I know quite a bit about the school, being around here since '56 as a player, as a student, as an assistant coach, as a head coach, and as an athletic director.

So the few gaps in the history of our Michigan State football—when I call it history, I'm talking about since 1947 when President Hannah hired Biggie--I've asked questions and I've found out some of the things that I really didn't know from sources like when I first came back as head coach, President Hannah had me out at his farm. We had lunch and he explained how he hired Duffy and who the other people were and filled in some spots that I didn't really know about.

I've gotten a lot of information from Doug Weaver, who was here. Doug came here, I think probably in '49, so he knew a lot about the few years before me that I didn't know about. I've gotten a lot of information from Sonny Grandelius, another player here, who's a close friend that was here before me.

Then after I came here, there was only a few years that I didn't know exactly what was going on in football, and that was mostly the years I was with the Pittsburgh Steelers. There's about ten years there that Denny Stoltz [phonetic] coached for three years and Darrell Rogers for four years and Muddy for three. Well, out of Denny's three years, I knew most of those years because those kids were here when I left and they were young kids and finally gone.

But probably the four years Darrell Rogers was here and the three years Muddy was here, when Muddy left I knew a lot about the program from the kids that he'd left. But that Darrell Rogers era, about four years in there, is kind of a gray area. I learned a lot about those years from Curt Gibson, who was here then, and Rick Audis [phonetic], who's my insurance man or my investor. I invest with him now.

I felt that this is a school different than any other Big Ten school because of one thing, because of the youth of the school, modern football. Our heroes are President Hannah--I'm talking about athletics--Biggie Munn, Jack Breslin, Duffy Daugherty. Well, I knew all those people. I could touch them all. Jack Breslin and I were very, very close. He worked very hard to get me

back here as head football coach. I always wanted to feel that I was somewhat of a historian of Michigan State football, because I could cover so many years and had so many positions within the football program. Very, very few things about the Michigan State modern football that I don't know, because I wanted to know, for no other reason than to maybe tell you or anybody else who was interested.

Charnley: The importance of maintaining that tradition.

Perles: Because we do have it, see. Field and Yost, they don't know him, they didn't touch him, they didn't see him. Ours is unique. I never wanted the flame to burn out.

When I was head football coach, I always promoted Biggie and Duffy, for a lot of reasons. One main reason was that they both had camps, and I wanted both camps on my side. They had a little bit of squabbles. I figured if I could talk about both of them and have both of their camps in my corner, it was healthy. The other reason was to keep the flame going about Biggie, Duffy, Biggie, Duffy, I thought it was healthy for our program.

Charnley: When you spoke with Hannah at the farm that you mentioned, was there anything there that you were surprised at finding out about Biggie or Duffy that you hadn't learned or didn't know before?

Perles: Yes, that he interviewed Bud Wilkinson [phonetic] and Forrest Sheveresky [phonetic] and some prominent people, but Biggie pushed Duffy. President Hannah had a suspicion that Biggie

pushed Duffy in some ways because he didn't want his record beaten. Biggie had a tremendous record, and Biggie had a big ego. So do a lot of coaches.

After his first year, Duffy's first year was 1954, it was a lousy year. President Hannah said that Biggie wanted to let him go, and Hannah wouldn't let him. Well, the next year, 1955, Duffy won the championship and went to the Rose Bowl and won the Rose Bowl. Biggie got out of football too early because he had to, because of his health, because of a bleeding ulcer. When he was at the Rose Bowl, supposedly they had called Ralph Young and told him that he was no longer the athletic director, Biggie was going to come back and take over the athletic department.

When Biggie was athletic director, it was different than now. He was responsible for Phys Ed. He was responsible for athletics. He was responsible for intramurals. He was responsible for the golf course. He had it all. He definitely was in charge.

Biggie loved the Varsity Club. I ended up, my senior year, being president of the Varsity Club, and so, consequently, I could do no wrong. Oh, he loved the Varsity Club. He had a big sign up in the Varsity Club room. "The difference between good and great is a little extra effort." That was a big saying.

He had me in his office one time and said, "Come on with me." We went down the hall, and he went into every coach's office and ripped them all. I was embarrassed. Then we went back to the office, and he said, "Once a month you've got to show them who's running this goddamned joint." He would just, at random, go down there and rip them. They'd just listen and let him ramble on.

He was really in charge, and he was a strong guy. The story is that his mother was a janitor. He would go around Jenison Fieldhouse and shut lights off in the rooms, pick up paper, wake up kids that was on the couches out in the lobby, sleeping. If you really want to get in a jam with

Biggie, give one of the towel people or one of the people that worked down in the cage a hard time.

He'd be all over you. He had a great spot in his heart for the working man and the poor people. So we all knew, don't be monkeying around with Dick Kahn [phonetic] or any of the people that worked handing out towels, because you'd really get yourself in a jam.

When he exploded, he got all over them good. He was masculine. He was huge. He's not very tall, but he was thick and he was quite an athlete. He was an All-American fullback at Minnesota, and then when Brocklin Nagurski [phonetic] came in, he moved to guard and became an All-American guard. He was some kind of a tough football player. He was crude in a lot of ways. Oh, boy, He was a tough guy.

Charnley: How would you characterize his relationship with Duffy?

Perles: "Duffy's Toughies" was the nickname when Duffy coached the offensive line. They were called Duffy's Toughies. But Biggie had an ego, and I think it bothered him when Duffy had so much success and got so much recognition. That was somewhat of a bother. They were having words when I was assistant football coach for Duffy. Duffy would have to submit the people traveling to games, and Biggie would not agree, and scratch people off. Then Duffy would go to Jack Breslin, who would go to President Hannah.

At the end, Duffy had success and had an opportunity in 1958, I think it was, to go to Texas and to go to Notre Dame. I don't know what exact year that was. He turned down Texas and recommended Darrell Royal, who got the job. He turned down Notre Dame. So, part of the deal then was that Duffy did not report to Biggie, he reported to the president, to eliminate Biggie trying to grind on him somewhat.

Jack Breslin told me one time, he said that President Hannah called him in. Jack Breslin was like a son to Hannah. He had been a great athlete here in basketball, baseball, and football. He was his right-hand man, secretary of the board of trustees. This comes from Jack Breslin. He told me that Hannah called him in and said, “You go over there and you straighten Biggie out, or one of you are going to be gone.”

He went over there, he said, and Biggie started yelling and then Jack started yelling and said, “I’ll tell you what. He just sent me over here to straighten you out, and if one of us is going to be gone, it’s going to be you.” I mean, that was just a humorous story that Breslin told me. And that’s why I’m so close to the athletic department. All these stories from Breslin, from Hannah, from Biggie, from Duffy, it was just a natural to want to even know more.

Charnley: What was it about coaching that you—

Perles: I got hurt, and I had another year of eligibility. A couple of things I never found out. One was, I never found out why Duffy took a liking to me, because I was just a starter, I was just a player, I wasn’t an All-American. I wasn’t a great player. For some reason, he took a liking to me. When I got hurt, he asked me to stay on as a student assistant and work with the freshmen. In those days, you didn’t get anything for that. All you did was get a hat and a sweatshirt and a pair of sneakers, and you went out there and coached.

Our freshmen coaches were Henry Bullock and Gordy Surrick [phonetic], two guys that were coaching when I played. So as a senior, I went out and coached the freshmen, helping the freshmen coaches. After the one year of that, Duffy thought it would be a good idea to stay and get your master’s and work with the freshmen another year. So I wanted to get in coaching, and my

key was always going to be Duffy, so I did what he said. I went and got a master's in administration, thinking someday I might want to be a principal or superintendent or something in education. So I got my master's and coached the freshmen.

Well, after my fifth year, after my master's, he wanted me to go to Chicago and coach in the Catholic League. In those days, that was before the state championship started, the best league in the Midwest was the Chicago Catholic League. That's where Terry Brennan came from. It was just a great, great league. They had an opening at St. Rita's in Chicago on 63rd and Western on the south side where they had two thousand boys, all-boys' school. They were Augustinian priests that ran the school. He had a friend there, Ed Buckley, and he got me an assistant football job there.

While I was in school here, I was married. Sally and I had two children. So the four of us packed up and left Spartan Village, where we were living, and went on to Chicago on the South Side, got a house in a--we used to call them flats, one house here and then upstairs. This was a Polish family, Kohler. Mr. Kohler, we rented from, he basically had a kitchen down in the basement, and that's where he spent most of his time, and we had the first floor.

I taught at St. Rita's, and I was there a year. We won. We had a championship team. I called Duffy and said, "I don't know what I'm doing here in Chicago, Duffy, there's jobs in Michigan. I really miss home." I never did want to go far from Detroit or home. So he had an assistant by the name of Bill Yeoman [phonetic], who he got the head job for at the University of Houston. In those days, Houston was just a so-so job. He told Bill Yeoman, after he got the job, "I want you to hire—" Dan Boyster [phonetic] was on Duffy's staff. "I want you to hire Dan Boyster's brother, who's the head coach at St. Ambrose, and I want Tom Boyster to recommend George for the head coaching job at St. Ambrose."

Well, that happened. Bill Yeoman hired Tom Boyster. Tom Boyster recommended me to St. Ambrose. Duffy recommended me to St. Ambrose. I found out later the reason I got the job at St. Ambrose from Father Wisner [phonetic], who was the athletic director there, is because Eddie Rutherford recommended me. He liked the recommendations from Duffy and Tommy Boyster, but Eddie Rutherford was coaching at Denby High School and was the dean of high school coaches in the metropolitan Detroit area. That's what really impressed Father Wisner. Anyhow, I got that job.

Then being there at St. Rita's one year and being at St. Ambrose in Grosse Point Park there three years, another one of Duffy's assistants, John McVeigh, became the head football coach of Duffy's staff at the University of Dayton. What happened there is Dan Boyster, who I talked about earlier on Duffy's staff, wanted the Dayton job, and Duffy recommended him, and he went and interviewed.

John McVeigh was originally from Nassau, Ohio, and coached at Canton, Ohio, knew how pretty well. Went back-doored and—

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Perles: In those days, you could bring kids up. As a high school coach at St. Ambrose, I was bringing players up here from all over Detroit to help Michigan State. I got to know John McVeigh fairly well, not that well, but fairly well. So when he got the job, I went to the national convention in Chicago, and he interviewed me and offered me a job. I called Duffy, and he said, "Don't take it. It's a lousy job," because he was tee'd off at John. I took it anyhow. I went to Dayton. Duffy was upset over that, that I didn't listen to him.

Shortly after, he had an opening on his staff. I always thought I'd be the next coach hired here, and he hired someone else, Al Dorr [phonetic], one of our ex-players.

So I was at Dayton two years. It was one of the poorer programs in the country, poor school, Catholic school, trying to compete with the mid-American schools. Our first year, we won one game and lost eight games and tied one. So we used to say, "How'd you do? One, eight, and one." "Oh, you won eight?" [Laughter]

Charnley: It's like who's on first.

Perles: The second year, we had a tremendous turnaround and went eight and two. That was a big deal. Then that same Dan Boyster left Michigan State to go to the head-coaching job at Eastern Michigan. By that time, time healed and Duffy brought me back, and I was his assistant for five years, from '67 to '71. He called me and said that's he's in the twilight of his career, he's not going to be doing this much longer, and I ought to think about getting in professional football. He thought I'd be good for that.

So what happened, what really happened before that, though, was we were in spring practice, and we had an assistant coach with us, Tank Bullock [phonetic] that left for Baltimore. He was in Baltimore in 1970. They won the Super Bowl. Then in '71 he was there. He called me in '71 in the spring and said that Chuck Knowle [phonetic], the head coach at Pittsburgh Steelers, was looking for a defensive line coach, and he had just called Baltimore and talked to one of the other assistants, John Sandusky [phonetic], and asked him if he knew of anybody. Then he hung up and then Sandusky, Henry Bullock being on the same staff, told him, he said, "Why didn't you recommend George?"

He said, "I didn't think of it," because I knew Sandusky slightly because he'd been watching practices, out scouting.

So Henry called me, and he said, "Call Chuck Knowle and tell him that John Sandusky told you to call and maybe he's interested in you."

So I did. Chuck took the call, invited me in for an interview. I had an interview, got there on a Thursday, stayed overnight, interviewed Friday, and I got a plane back home Friday about five o'clock. I went to the old armory place here and met my wife, my friend owned it, Bobby Bopp. I thought I had this job. It was a lock. We went through film, he asked me a lot of questions, we had lunch, he showed me some techniques that he'd like taught. On the way to the airport, he showed me where the other coaches lived and so on and so forth. So he said that he would call me Monday morning, nine o'clock, which he did. He said, "I'm going to coach the linebackers one more year." He was head coach, but he was coaching a position. He says, "I'm hearing another guy to coach the defensive line, after a year I'm moving him to linebackers, I'm bringing you in."

Well, I didn't know Chuck Knowle. I figured that's a good way of letting a guy off. So I asked him, I said, "Is there any corrective criticism you want me to work on next year?"

"No, stay the way you are."

Well, a year later, it happened that he called and offered me the job. Duffy was very supportive and called him and recommended me. But some of the preliminary things were done before that. So I went off to Pittsburgh Steelers, and Duffy stayed one more year, then he retired.

So I was there ten years, and then there's a whole other story. After I was there seven years and Darrell Rogers left to go to Arizona State, and we had just come off a Super Bowl, our fourth, and I was a hot number because I was associated with the four Super Bowls. So the speculation

was by everyone that I was coming back as the head football coach. The *Detroit News* sent photographers out to Pittsburgh to take pictures, and everybody was ready for it.

Well, what happened is that I didn't get it. I remember I got a call from the *Detroit Free Press* asking what I thought about being so close and not getting it. I didn't know anything. That's how I found out. Well, what happened is it started to leak, so they had to [unclear] to the sports information director and the people had to get stuff going quick, and they didn't have enough time to call me. They did shortly after, but they didn't have enough time to get me before the newspaper guy did.

I found out about that, and I probably said the right thing. I said, "Well, you know, I'm sure they know what they're doing, and whatever's best for Michigan State. I'll always be positioned, if they need my help, I'll help," which was a good thing to say. People expected me to have sour grapes and to criticize, but I didn't. I never found out why I wasn't hired then for sure. One board member was using "No head coaching experience."

But anyhow, in July of 1982, shortly before that, the U.S.A. Football League, USFL, U.S.A. Football League started, and I got hired as the head football coach at Philadelphia Stars. I went there in July, and right after our season here, Muddy's third season, he got let go. He was let go before the season, and I knew the job was open. I was interested. I had just taken the Philadelphia Stars job. I was making at the Steelers like sixty-nine five. I was going to the Philadelphia Stars for 115, 125, and 160. Anyhow, together it was 400,000 over three years, whatever that is. I think it's 115, 125, that's 40, yes, 160.

It was a contract with the owners, a personal contract, not with the club, in case they defaulted. I figured I'd go there, I could make almost twice as much money as I'm making. If it

doesn't work, I always can get a job in the NFL because we had so much success with the Steelers' four Super Bowls. So I went there.

Well, then the Michigan State job opened. I sat and waited and no one called, no one called. Finally, I talked to a good friend of mine, Joe Farrell. He said, "Why don't you call Doug Weaver," one Sunday night when my wife had gone out to the store. So I did. He wasn't home. His wife answered.

I was commuting back and forth to Philly on the weekends, and this was a Sunday night. So, Monday, I was getting ready to catch a plane and go to Philly and the phone rang. I answered it and it was Doug Weaver. He asked me a couple of questions, "Can you leave? Would you leave? Are you interested?" and so on and so on. I told him how interested I was.

She came out of the bed, "What's going on? Where are you going?" because we knew when I didn't get the job before, when Muddy got it, it paid 50,000. She thought that was—"You're going to go there?"

I said, "Oh, no, just relax." I said, "If I don't take it, at least I can recommend the job and maybe I'll get one of my friends a job."

Well, Doug came to Philadelphia. We went into the Stadium Hilton, right by the stadium there in Philadelphia, called the Stadium Hilton. Doug registered us under Fred Good and Tony Schwartz or something like that. We went up to the room, and he proceeded to tell me all about how good a job it was and all this and this for about an hour. Then he said, "Do you want this damn job or don't you?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "All right. Order a pot of coffee." He took his coat off, I took mine off, and he said, "I'm going to give you \$95,000 and a car. President [M. Cecil] Mackey's only making 85,000."

I said, "Hey, I don't want 95, make me 80."

"No, that's the way he wants it. We'll give you a country club, and we'll do this, we'll do that, we'll do that." So Doug then was really like an agent then, trying to get me everything he could. I remember we were in the room, and it was a nice room that was kind of a suite. It had an archway in the middle. It was two rooms with an archway. So he says, "Go stand over there." So I was standing here looking at him ten feet away, and he's on the phone. "No, he's in the other room. Now, we've got to get him the country club, we've got to do this, we've got to do that." He was negotiating for me. He was my freshman coach. He was a close friend, and so they worked that out.

Then he said, "Do you want me to go down with you and tell the Stars, Miles Tannenbaum [phonetic], that you're going, or do you want to handle it?"

I said, "No, I'll handle it."

So I went back to King of Prussia, and I called Miles, the owner's home. He was gone, I'll never forget it, to a dinner for the University of Pennsylvania, which is his alma mater. They were at some kind of alumni dinner.

So I waited, waited. He got home about ten at night, and told him what happened. I was offered this job, I'd like to go.

And "I know, George, we hate to see you go, but I know you always wanted to go back to Michigan State and so on and so forth."

So we hung up, and I went back to my room. I had Larry Belot [phonetic], one of my assistants, living with me there, because we'd only been there five months waiting until school's out. I had Steve Furness [phonetic] with me, another assistant coach, Joe Pendry [phonetic], another assistant coach, and an equipment guy. We had a big apartment there that they got for me.

I told the coaches, "Now I'm going to go to Michigan State. You've got two-year contracts here. You can stay or come with me." Well, Pendry, I had just hired him from Michigan State, so he had been here. He wanted to stay with them. Belot and Furness wanted to come back with me.

About midnight, the phone rang, and it was Miles Tannenbaum. Now it was different attitude. He was yelling and screaming, "We're going to sue, we're going to do this, we're going to do that, and I'll see you tomorrow for brunch." So I stayed up all night. Boy, I was scared to death he was going to queer this deal.

So, next morning, Carl Petersen, he was our general manager of the Stars, who now is the president and G.M. of the Kansas City Chiefs, Carl came over and tried to--"What do you need? What can we give you?"

I said, "Carl, there's nothing material you can give me. I don't care what it is. I'm going back home. I want to go home." I'd been in Pittsburgh all those years and we had great success, but I missed home somewhat. Now I'm in Philadelphia. [Whistles] That was a long ways.

I remember I used to tell Chuck Knowle when we were flying to Denver or wherever we were going on the trips, he used to like to kid me. He'd say, "Hey, isn't it beautiful in Denver with all the mountains?"

I said, "Chuck, first of all, I'm not going any further south than Cincinnati Bengals. I'm not going any further north than the Minnesota Vikings. I'm not going any further west than the Chicago Bears, and I'm as far east as I'm going."

Because when I was at Michigan State as assistant, I was offered defensive coordinator's job at Colorado. I was assistant freshman coach here, actually working for Eddie Rutherford. I turned it down. When I was at Dayton, I was offered assistant's job at Arizona and Arizona State and turned them both down. Just like I was offered the Green Bay Packers job when I was here, and I was offered the New York Jets job when I was here, and I turned them both down.

Something with my personality, I just can't live anywhere. I knew when I came to school here, my goal in life was to be assistant football coach at Michigan State. I knew when I was assistant here that no matter where I went in my career, we were going to live here in East Lansing. This was always going to be home base.

So when I was at Dayton, I couldn't think about living out in Arizona. I accepted Green Bay and then the next morning, I got cold feet. The Jets, I was there with the media next door for a press conference, and they slipped me out the back. That's when they gave me A.D., and so I came back to be A.D. I didn't have the courage to go with the Jets. I didn't want to be in New York, and I rationalized it, think how much the cost of living, and this and that. I had a chance to make millions.

Where did I leave off before that?

Honhart: Well, I've got a question for you. Going back just a little bit, what was it like being an assistant for Duffy?

Perles: Oh, it was great. My first high school job, Ed Buckley, he wasn't much fun to work for. But then after that, working for John McVeigh, Duffy Daugherty, and Chuck Knowle was great. Working for Duffy was great.

Duffy was an interesting guy. He'd get up in the morning. In his house there's a glass table here. He'd get his robe on. He was funny. He'd get his robe on. He'd have coffee and oatmeal and visit with Francine and keep her company until about eleven. Then he'd come to the office. All you had to do is get to the office at ten to eleven, and you'd beat him in. Then he'd come in, "Sylvia (his secretary), cheeseburger." Now he could relax and have a nice big cheeseburger, work the afternoon. If it wasn't football season, I used to drive him. I used to drive him a lot. He played gin over at Mitch Otey's [phonetic]. Mitch Otey had the--right by Kalamazoo, that party store there?

Charnley: Otey's Party Store?

Perles: Yes. Is it still called Otey's?

Charnley: Yes.

Perles: Mitch Otey owned it.

Charnley: That tradition is still there.

Perles: Then if you go in the front door--I haven't been there in years--you go in the front door, there's an office there with one-way glass. Duffy and Otey would play gin there, and then Otey could see through the one-way glass what was going on. They played in there. Duffy drank seven-

ounce splits of champagne. He loved champagne, and he liked the seven-ounce ones so they'd stay chilled. They'd play gin.

During the season, we met. We used to have a hotel room at the Holiday Inn, the old Holiday Inn by Frandar [phonetic], and then we used to have the University Inn, room 800, and then we had a room over by the golf course, that hotel up there.

Honhart: Harley's [phonetic]?

Perles: Whatever that is. We'd go to the different ones, and we would talk football. Then we'd have some champagne or drinks, we never met in the office, and watch film and then watch the eleven o'clock news. He'd go home. Next morning, he'd get up again, put his robe on, take care of Francie, pass by her, and then come to the office.

Duffy didn't have a mean bone in him. The best thing that could happen to you over at Duffy's is get him upset and him get after you, then he'd work all week just trying to make up. He didn't have a mean bone in him. He laughed every day. He was a great guy to work for. So was Chuck Knowle and so was John McVeigh. I never had a tough guy to work for.

Charnley: What do you think you learned in the pros that you were able to bring back to Michigan State in your coaching career?

Perles: Well, the self-discipline that Chuck Knowle had. Chuck Knowle was like an arrow. There was no stopping for a drink. There was no having a celebration after a championship game. The only thing that counted was the Super Bowl, nothing else. He was always organized. He had a

unique thing about him, he never criticized the players, the starters, only the stars. He went after Bradshaw. He went after Franco. He went after Joe Green. He went after the Jack Kemps. The better you were, the more he got after you. The other guys just fell in line. A lot of people are scared of the big-timers and they go after the easy guys and make examples of them. Not Chuck. The better you were, the more he wanted a piece of you.

Now, the other guys, boy, they shaped up fast because they saw that. Chuck was honest, straight, brilliant. Probably, in my opinion, the two guys that were the most brainy in professional sports were Shula and Knowle. Chuck could have been a surgeon. He had great gray matter. He was a pilot. He had a huge boat that he had all the apparatuses on it for sailing, for cruising. Chuck's a brilliant guy, hard, tough. Boy, tough German. Bite the bullet, anything. He wouldn't back down on anything. He could correct the officials. They'd come over and he'd correct them. One official put his finger in and he said, "I'll break that finger off. Get that out of my face," and he was tough. The players, Bradshaw, he'd walk by the office on his tippy-toes so Chuck wouldn't hear him, because if he did, he'd call him in and make him look at film. Chuck would work, work, work. But he came in at a reasonable time and left at a reasonable time. He got more done in regular time than most people.

But a real religious guy. I mean, he didn't overdo it, but he was clean cut, a sharp, sharp guy. So, a lot of things you learn from him. Distractions, no distractions. He'd limit them. And he never fined a player. I remember a guy came in late, and he said, "I'm not fining you. One more time and you'll be in your life's work." Boy, I'll tell you. We had Bay Pearly [phonetic], who was All-World quarterback coach. He unloaded him. Chuck Sumner, he unloaded him. Bob Fry, I mean he unloaded their ass, boy, if they didn't work hard.

I never saw anybody fired. Duffy never fired anybody. No one ever fired anybody, hardly, in those days. My first guy I saw fired was Charlie Sumner. Christ, I was shocked, so I waited in the hallway there until he came to his office. I said, "How am I? Are you going to fire me?"

"No, you're all right. What gives you that--?"

When you worked for Chuck, you didn't go in and negotiate. He would come around. I had eleven one-year contracts, so we only had one year. He'd say, "Got a minute?" You'd go in his office. Never have enough time to sit down. He'd stand in the middle of the office. "You did a good job. I'm going to give you a \$10,000 raise." Gone.

I was sitting at my camera looking at film one time. I knew it was the day, though. We all knew what day he was doing this, because whoever got caught first, the word spread in the office. I knew he was coming around, so I'm watching film. I don't even know what the hell I was watching. Dark room. He come in and shut the film off. Now it's dark in there. He's sitting next to you. He said, "You did a good job, and we'd like to give you so much raise."

Now, one time I was in my office, and I must have been first because I wasn't aware that he was coming. I was working. Well, I had a defensive office with three guys in it, and those two were out of it. He sat in the other coach's chair, and he said, "You know, it's not easy for me to say good things." He said, "It's just not easy for me to say those things, but you've done a good job so we're going to give you this much raise." I never interviewed for any other job, never thought about leaving, only had a one-year contract, and got a raise every year.

But between him and Mr. Rooney and Dan Rooney, his son, it was probably the best situation in professional sports, because a lot depends on the owner. Mr. Rooney was top shelf, and they treated us real good. Mr. Rooney liked me because, two things, because he used to say,

“You’re the best knife-and-fork man I know,” because he liked to eat, too. I had three sons, he had five sons, and he liked seeing those kids.

Honhart: When you left Philadelphia to come here and you took over a program that was not doing very well at that time, what did you do to start to turn it around?

Perles: Discipline was going to be the first thing. I had one thing different than most people. I got John, my son, sitting out in front of me. My son John was a scholarship athlete here. He was in his junior year. Pat is at Kent State on scholarship. So he transfers over to Michigan State, and now I’ve got two sons and I’m coaching at Michigan State. You’re not going to try to fool kids, anyhow, you’re going to be what you are, but you know you got your two kids there.

So I was tough on them. I told them that “There’s probably 20 percent of you are going to really like this program. There’s going to be about 20 percent that don’t. But you guys in the middle, I’m going to get you on one side or the other. You’re either going to be in this program and want to go or get in the other program and I’ll run your ass out of here. Take your hats off. No earrings.” I had some things that weren’t popular that they don’t demand a lot of those things at most places right now. I wouldn’t let them.

I said, “Earrings.” I’d tell them, “You want to wear an earring, I’ll get you a dress, some long socks, you go stand on the corner down on Lansing.” They’d laugh. I said, “If my mother ever caught me coaching a guy with earrings, she’d be disappointed. You’re not wearing that shit around here. Not in my building.”

Before a meal, they had to wait outside. The rumor came, and I heard it, they used to go in there early and eat all the rolls up. The last guy in, the rolls were gone. Funny guys. “You wait

outside until my ass is in there, and then you all come in at the same time.” Then if they were late, I’d get after them so. I had them so disciplined at times, they’d be fifteen, twenty minutes early waiting outside so they weren’t late.

It was a great challenge to me to make them do things they didn’t want to do that were for their benefit. I loved it. It wears on you. It’s not easy, because it’s not one or two. I had sometimes up to 150 kids on the team. But they all knew when they did something, I took care of it. I disciplined. I wouldn’t tell the press anything. That irritated the press, but I always felt they were my kids and I’m going to treat them like my sons. And I had two sons on the team. When they did something, they were going to get a pat on the back for good and they were going to catch holy hell for bad, but it wasn’t going to be any of the media’s business or anybody else’s. I kept it private. They appreciated that.

Charnley: How would you say your coaching philosophy has evolved from your experience as an assistant under Duffy and then as assistant under Chuck Knowle? What were some of those principles that you started with? Obviously, discipline is one of them.

Perles: Well, discipline and a great philosophy and an old philosophy on running the football and not being able to have it run against you. Playing a conservative pass defense where you gave up some yardage, you gave up some first downs, but you tried to eliminate the big plays. Eliminate big plays, not have turnovers, be able to run the football, and not let them run the football.

Probably didn’t emphasize enough special teams. If I was going back to criticize myself, I would say that. Probably should have put more emphasis on special teams than I did.

We won the Rose Bowl. I don't know offhand, though, I think we only threw seven or so passes. We pounded that son of a gun. We used to talk about pound Green pound [?]. I wanted to play a physical game. I wanted our players to be known as tough guys. Michigan State guys always had that reputation of being guys that could really hand it out and take it if they had to. I used to tell them before they walked out the door going to a game, I said, "I don't give a shit about the Xs and Os. You go out there and knock their ass off, you come in here, I'll hug you, win, lose, or die." Just tried to emphasize the toughness part of the game. We were pretty, pretty physical, but we had a lot of work to do.

I always said, "Don't judge my program until the fifth year." Well, some of the media interpreted that to say we were going to win the Rose Bowl in five years, which we did. They said, "Well, you're a prophet." I said, "I'm not a prophet. I didn't say I was going to win the Rose Bowl. I said, don't judge the program till five years." We happened to go in five years and win it. We kept it going for a while.

When I turned down Green Bay after five years here, I was recruiting after the Rose Bowl. I got a call from the general manager of the Green Bay Packers, Tom Bratz, B-R-A-T-Z, something like that. He wanted to talk to me. So I'm in the office recruiting on a Sunday, and my wife calls me and says, "Tom Bratz is at the airport. He needs a ride."

I says, "I'm here with recruits. I can't leave. Would you go get him?" She's kind of shy. She isn't big on going picking up strangers and bringing them home, but she did. So I come home, she got out of the house and went shopping, Sunday, get the hell out of there.

So, we talked and we talked and we talked. No offer. Showed me the roster, showed me this, showed me that. Nothing big deal. So he leaves. I take him to the airport.

I get home, and, Christ, Jack _____ is calling, people are calling, and it's screwing up my recruiting, so I search him down. I knew he was going to go to the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Alabama. I search him out, I know what hotels, because I've been there so many times, where the different coaches stay. So I got him, and I said, "Tom," I said, "this is screwing up my recruiting. I'm not interested."

"Oh, I know, I know. Okay, okay." He wasn't shocked, nothing. Well, he didn't accept that. So--

[Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

Perles: --Chicago, at the O'Hare Inn, the Hilton, whatever that hotel is right at the airport. So I went over there and we went in a regular room that had a double bed and it had a little cocktail table, two chairs. So the president of the Green Bay Packers sat in one chair and I sat here and the bed was there and Tom Bratz, the G.M., sat on the bed. We talked and we talked and we talked. They offered me the job.

I accepted the job. I said, "But you can't say anything till I get back home. I'm not going to call Doug Weaver up and tell him. I've got to go see him in person, because I just can't do that to him on the phone." So we agreed.

I got up the next morning rather early because I didn't want to run into these guys. I already had the job. I didn't want to screw it up. So I went to the airport, O'Hare, and just found out where's the next plane going to either Detroit, Grand Rapids, or Lansing, any one.

I got out of there. Damned if I don't have to go to Detroit and I'm getting off the plane, and who do I run into? An old baseball player, Charlie Papa Maxwell. I don't know Charlie, but he

recognizes me, and I've got to get back to Lansing, and he wants to talk. We're talking and talking and talking. I enjoyed talking to him, because I've known about him so long.

Get picked up, go back to Lansing, and so I called Doug Weaver. He comes over. Not this house; we had another house. We go down the basement, and we talk and we talk and we talk. This is about five o'clock, so we send my wife and his wife out to get ribs. We started having drinks. Pretty soon he's got to go home.

Roger Wilkinson comes over and he's got tears in eyes and he's hugging me. David Scott's the provost, he's calling, and he says, "We've got to keep our stars. We have deans around here and professors around here we have to keep. They're our stars, and you're a star, and we got to keep you," and all this.

So I'm down in the basement, and finally, I had to answer the machine on the bar down there so I could screen the calls, and Joe Farrell calls. He's a close friend. He works for the school. He's basically a lobbyist for the medical school. I said, "Joe, I'm so sick of this."

While I'm down there, Frank Kelley [phonetic], he's a close friend, he's with the Governor Blanchard, coming back from Detroit. They're, "You can't leave. We'll shoot ourself in the foot. Right after the Rose Bowl, you leave, it will screw everything up," Blanchard's saying.

Frank says, "I'll be over to see you."

The phone rings, Joe Farrell calls, and I said, "Joe, I am so tired of this telephone. If you want to talk, get your ass over here." He only lived a mile away, so he came over and we're talking. I said, "You know what amazes me, I've down in this basement since noon." Now it's about nine o'clock. I said, "I've talked to everybody, and no one's offered five cents, not a nickel. I can't believe that." I said, "Not that I would take it."

So now Frank comes in, and so Joe repeats what I said to him to Frank. So Frank goes over to the bar where the phone is, he grabs the phone, and he calls Larry Owen, who's chairman of the board of trustees. He said, "Larry, I want the votes for George."

What did I want? Frank's talking to me before he gets on the phone. I said, "Frank, if I was staying here, I'm going to be sixty-two in eight and a half years. I want an eight-and-a-half-year contract, and I want annuity to make sure that Sally's taken care of, the same as I would have in the pros." That was basically a \$45,000-a-year annuity in five years.

So Frank calls and says, "I want this and I want those votes and I want them tonight. He's telling Larry Owen, who is chairman of the board. So Larry calls back at midnight, says, "It's all done, and we'll see George tomorrow morning." Well, as it was, he didn't have the votes at midnight. He said that, but he got them like two or three in the morning.

So the next morning, Frank, Joe Farrell, and Larry Owen came over to my house. So I called Sally over. They talked to Breslin before they came over. Breslin said, "Are you nuts? Eight and a half years, we'll look like goofs. Make it ten years." So they're offering me a ten-year contract. They're offering me a \$45,000-a-year annuity the rest of my life and her life, and that would take me to about sixty-four years old.

So I said, "Sally?"

She said, "Whatever you want to do." So I stayed, which was probably a mistake, because then the shit hit the fan because now [John A.] DiBiaggio is in another country, I forget where.

Honhart: Thailand, I think.

Perles: And David Scott is making decisions. When he finds out that I got a ten-year contract that he knew nothing about and that I got an annuity that he didn't have, he was pissed off and tried to find out if it could be voided.

Well, what happened, Frank knew what he was doing, because I thought that Larry Owen had the power to do this. That made it a legal contract, because I thought Larry was chairman of the board, but he really didn't. So DiBiaggio couldn't fight it, but from then on, boy, he took it out on me. So that was the end of that.

Then two years later, Doug Weaver was going to retire, and I wanted to be A.D. for the simple reason--and Judd wanted me to be A.D. and so did Ron Mason, because we didn't know who they might hire come in and just change everything around, and just the insecurities you have, wanting to keep things going, because Doug was a great A.D. for us. So I wanted the job, and so I had to get my back up and walk over to see DiBiaggio, tell him I wanted an interview, and it was all hockey-pokey.

When we were over at the Hula Bowl, DiBiaggio said, "Go see Roger. He's the one in charge." They were passing me around a little bit. Poor Roger, he didn't know what to do. He was just taking his orders from DiBiaggio. DiBiaggio wanted no part of it.

So when the Jets offered me the position, I went to New York, and I had to negotiate with the general manager on one side, and then behind on this side of the table, him and I and the president from--he was the owner's main guy. He didn't keep an office at the football building. He was a tough New York negotiator. He was trying to beat me up, but I wasn't budging a bit, because I already had something good at home.

So I finally got the deal I wanted. We agreed, and we went over to the table in his office. We were starting to work on some football business. He said, "Before you leave here, this isn't a

contract, but this says everything in it. So in case you get hit with a truck, we got this down. But before you sign it, you better get permission from Michigan State. We don't want them to sue us."

So I went down to another office by myself, and I called Doug Weaver. He wasn't in. He was over at the health center. He was over getting a treadmill test. So I called Roger. Larry Owen was in Roger's office with Kathy Wilber [phonetic]. They were trying to get that vote to make me A.D. So he says, "I don't have it yet, but I'm going to get it. Call me back in forty-five minutes." So I went back down to that office, told them I had to call back in forty-five minutes.

I called back in forty-five minutes, and he said, "We got it. Come on home."

So I went back and told them, "You'd better call Larry Owen. They're not going to let me go." I didn't want to go then. I wanted to be A.D. and head coach.

So I came home, and they had an emergency meeting that night over at Kellogg, and it was live on T.V.

Charnley: I remember that.

Perles: I slipped out the door and was over at one of my assistant coach's house down in the basement watching it. The whole staff was there because it's their livelihood. The vote came where I was A.D. Now, holy Christ, DiBiaggio was furious. Before the year was up, he got the board to make a resolution that one person couldn't have two positions, so I had to choose. They all assumed I was going to choose A.D. I would have chosen A.D. if they'd let me finish the last season so these coaches could have had a chance to regroup, but I had to make a decision right then, so I decided to be a football coach. Then that's when DiBiaggio hired Mary Lee [phonetic] and left a day later.

But what happened, that Green Bay thing really wrecked our relationship. We were decent friends before that, but he was tee'd off at that. Had I known all that, who's running, who's going to be mad and who isn't, I'd have got the hell out and gone to Green Bay. I would have said that's the reason I should have gone to Green Bay. I shouldn't have gone to Green Bay for money. Or I shouldn't have gone to Green Bay for any other reason than to eliminate all that controversy, which wasn't tough on me, because I'd been in the arena for a long time, but it really was tough on my wife. It was tough on her hearing that noise. It's like watching the game in the stands. It's tougher than being on the field. Hell, you're involved. You've got things to do. When you're sitting in the stands, she had to hear all that noise, and it wasn't fun for her. But, like everything else, time heals.

Charnley: When you were athletic director, what was your attitude toward the non-revenue sports?

Perles: Well, it's like when I went to St. Ambrose, I followed a coach in there, Tom Boyston, who had championship teams. There was no room for improvement on the field. The only room for improvement was with the principal, the nun, and the relationship with her, because Tom was winning and he didn't get along with her. So I capitalized on that in making sure we had a good relationship and brought her into the fold.

What was the question?

Charnley: I was asking about non-revenue sports while you were A.D.

Perles: Doug Weaver was a great A.D., but he told them, “I take care of football, I take care of hockey, I take care of basketball.” The rest of them, when he hired them, he’d say, “Just be competitive, try to win half of them, I’m not giving you the full budget, I’m not going to give you that, don’t ask for it.” So non-revenue were struggling financially.

So when I was A.D., the best place for the morale of the athletic department was to give more to the non-revenue sports. I needed nothing in football. Judd needed nothing. Mason needed nothing. We watched the budget pretty close. I think the first year we were plus 1.5 million. The second year we were 1.8, so I had money to give to non-revenue sports.

It was amazing. It wasn’t that much, but the little bit, they appreciated. They have a big voice because they have numbers. They were beating my drums just for the little bit I did for them. You’re a good athletic director. What’s that mean? That means you keep the books in order, that you end up in the black, that you don’t have any violations, and this and that.

But where the drums were really beating were all those non-revenue sports. It was only because when Doug came in, the school’s in the red, he couldn’t take care of them. He had to get this going. He was just about ready to do what he did, but he left so I got credit for taking care of them because he didn’t. But he couldn’t. He could have when I did. That’s really the truth on why I got a good grade as far as A.D., was because of the positive things that the non-revenues said about me.

Charnley: How would you characterize your relationship with Judd Heathcote and Ron Mason?

Perles: Excellent. They loved it because every time I’d see Judd, “What do you need?” “Nothing.” “Ron, what do you need?” “Nothing.” They have everything they need. I’d always try. Judd and

I and Ron, we were very good friends to start with, so that was a no-brainer having them as basketball and hockey coach. So everybody was happy. The three main sports were, the non-revenue was, we were making money, so everything was going smoothly.

But before I became A.D., I knew it six months ahead of time, so I spent every extra minute I had over in Doug's office sitting at a table like this, while he was working, just sitting. When he'd get a call or when he was talking to the NCAA, I'd get on the other line and listen. So I had six months of preparation, and I learned from a good one, Doug.

Charnley: You talked about a typical day for Duffy. How would you describe a typical day when you were head coach?

Perles: I would try to get there maybe 7:15. Give myself forty-five minutes in the morning to get whatever done, get a cup of tea. First, get in there, change from my street clothes to coaching clothes so I was ready for the day. Get a cup of tea, get behind my desk, and I might have a half hour of stuff to do. I might have ten minutes of stuff to do. I might not have much to do. Then I get another cup of tea, and then I'd go into the meeting room. I liked to sit there and look at--we always the board there, the players--and just study it, study it, who's hurt, who's going to be back next year.

And always have an eight o'clock meeting. My thinking was if I meet at eight o'clock, I don't have to hear about going to the dentist, I picked up the kids, I dropped the kids off. Eight o'clock meeting every single day during the season. Now, the meeting might only last two minutes, but they're there. Everybody's on the job. If you don't, you've got the red light, the bridge went up, there's all kinds of shit that happens, you've got so many people.

Eight o'clock meeting, trainer there, equipment guy there, everybody accounted for. Maybe five after eight, that's it. "See you guys." It got to the point where some days I wouldn't have a whole lot to do, I'd get in the meeting room maybe twenty to eight, cup of coffee, and these guys kept coming in earlier and earlier. There was one occasion we started a meeting before eight, and we were done before eight o'clock.

I had one coach, a good friend, still good friend, he'd come in right at the wire. Every day he'd come in just at the wire. We had a phone on the wall, and it had the time on the phone. He'd come in, he'd beat it. He never was late, but that one day, we were done before he got there. I used to call him "the afternoon shift guy." He wasn't late. Always, always had a meeting during the season every day so everybody was accounted for.

Then we'd go. I'd let them coach. The first year, I was real involved with defense because I was teaching the stunt four three, the scheme. After the first year, I named Nick Sabin [phonetic] the defensive coordinator, and I had Morris Watts on offense. I let those guys coach. I never criticized them in front of the players. I didn't look over their shoulder. They had a lot of leeway. They had what I had most of the time when I was coaching, and that's a good environment when you can coach your position. You got anything to say, you have a meeting, and "Goddamn it, we've got to run the ball. You're monkeying around all day, it looks like basketball." They'd get the message.

During the game, I had a switch. I could go from offense to defense, and I'd go back and forth. They'd ask me, "We're going to blitz," and they'd want permission to blitz sometimes. Nick Sabin was famous for that, wanting permission to blitz, because if it didn't work, it was going to be a big one. When they wanted a blitz, I went with it. Morris, at times when we'd have the game pretty well wrapped up, "Keep it on the ground. I don't want to see that son of a bitch in the air

anymore. We got this won. We're not trying to see how many points we can win by. We just want to win the game. We got them."

I remember we were playing Indiana. Winner goes to the Rose Bowl. They went down and kicked a field goal. We tie or we win, we go to the Rose Bowl. All we've got to do is tie. They go down, they kick a field goal. We come and we've got the ball on like eight yard line. It's third down and eight. I'm scared. I know one thing. I'm getting a field goal and tying this son of a bitch, if nothing else. That's the worst that can happen. So I make them run. It's such a bad call, third and eight from the eight. You've got to be an idiot to run the ball there. The hole's so big because they're expecting a pass, we scored a touchdown. I mean, that's how bad of a call it was. But it was something they didn't expect. They didn't realize that I wasn't trying to win right there. I just wanted them to run, get tackled, and kick a field goal and tie the game up, because we had Langlaw [phonetic], a pretty good kicker. But that's what I did.

Then on offense, I'd substitute the running backs. I used to grab them, throw them in, and hold them. I'd get the feeling when they were hot. Lorenzo. I always had pretty good running backs, and I'd substitute them.

Honhart: Who were some of the players that you coached that you really have memories about?

Perles: Michigan State or pro?

Charnley: At Michigan State.

Perles: Well, Lorenzo, you know, as a sophomore he was third for the Heismann. I always thought he should have got the Heismann. The guy that got it was from Auburn. I forget his name. He had a great career when he was a senior, but he didn't have as good years. The senior year, Lorenzo was better. That trophy, the Heismann, is sometimes an accumulation of your career rather than just that season. But Lorenzo was a great running back.

Mandrich [phonetic], the best offensive lineman that we've had around here in a long, long, long, long time. Classiest, tough offensive setter, with class that's someday going to be a head football coach, Pat Schermer [phonetic], who now's with the Eagles, tight ends coach. Brilliant guy, Dino Trabelli [phonetic], who interviewed for the Rhodes. We had another guy that was considered for the Rhodes, Wassiak [phonetic].

Then the greatest kid I offered to come as a walk-on, finally gave him a scholarship, ended up being All-World, Bobby Morris, who played a lot of pro football. Danny Enos, super college quarterback that had average ability, but he made things happen so you won. He's at Western Michigan now, coaching the quarterbacks, being considered as a quality-control guy with the Chicago Bears. He might even find out today.

The classic guys like Jim Morrissey, middle linebacker Shane Bulla. One great player that hasn't had much success since being drafted in the first round, who was a great player for us, Percy Snow. Allen Haller [phonetic], a great player for us, a sergeant in the campus police department now. We have about four or five of our ex-players that are policemen in Lansing. I don't know why we recruit so many guys that ended up being policemen, but we do.

Jim Miller, the quarterback that's with the Bears, he was a class guy. John Miller, another one, a defensive back from Farmington. Harrison. Johnny Miller. And then the little wide receiver that's from the same school that sells Equitable Insurance now, little black kid, short one.

Charnley: Yes, I know who you're talking about

Perles: Brilliant kid, smart kid, great student.

Charnley: Milt the Thrill?

Perles: Milt the Thrill, that's who it is. Milt Coleman. The ones that jump out at you are the good players that were smart. Or they do with me. Schermer, Altabelli, Wasiack, Milt Coleman, Johnny Miller, Jim Miller.

I had three walls up there: I had the first-rounders, I had the academic All-Americans, and I had the regular All-Americans. Without a doubt, the best one would be as academic All-American. You look at those kids, what's going on. The worst wall is first-rounders. Whew. That's a tough wall. A lot of disappointments there. The All-Americans is some worked out and some didn't. Of course, you've got some of those first-rounders on that All-American wall. But that academic thing, the Bobby Morris and Shane Bullas.

Then you had some great players like Andre Risen [phonetic], who was a great wide receiver. Oh, what a pain in the neck. I mean, you earned your money to chase him around, try and make him go to school, and stay eligible and stay out of trouble, but that's your job.

Your job is to take care and help these kids. We bring in, not at Michigan State, the whole country, we bring in some tough kids, tough street kids. We expect them to come here and all of a sudden on this beautiful campus live by our rules. They've been used to grabbing girls by the butt,

fighting, stealing, robbing, and they get their hands slapped. There's so many, what are you going to do? Then they come here, and they've got to shape up. They used to try to pound their head.

After every practice, you'd get together as a team in a circle, get on their knee, take a break. This isn't Detroit. This isn't Cleveland. This is East Lansing. You'd better abide by these laws or they're going to lock your ass up. You can't walk in anybody's room. You can't touch anybody. You can't do those things. It's a constant counseling on the field day after day after day after day, and it sinks in in a lot. We save a lot of kids. We lose some on the way.

When you're a coach and the kid gets off base, you've got to take that. You've got to take that for his grades. You're responsible for everything he does. When they get in the pros, it is different. No one holds the coaches responsible for their social or family life or whatever.

Hell, it comes back on me for '86, his senior year was 1986, a wide receiver from Flint, Mark Ingram [phonetic]. He just got in trouble. Since '86, I haven't had him, and it still comes back on me in 2001. Mark Ingram just got picked up in Miami with counterfeit money and this shit.

When you recruit a kid, you've got him for life as far as criticism goes. I'm smart enough to know that, what the hell, I couldn't do anything about it. Mark was a good kid. He's another first-rounder. You really just can't beat it in their head enough.

But the ones that stand out in my mind are the ones that were good players and good students. I know one thing, these coaches are doing a hell of a job trying to save a lot of kids, and they do. They save a lot of them. They lose a lot of them.

Honhart: What about recruiting? What's that like as far as [unclear]?

Perles: Recruiting's not as bad as it used to be. We didn't have a national letter. Then we had one that was in May. Then it went to April. Now we're the first Wednesday in February, today. So you have a dead period from a couple of days before Christmas until about the middle of January, because you've got the national convention, the holidays, and all that. You basically only have recruiting weekends four or five, so it's real short.

Recruiting is a humbling experience. I remember the day I was down at Dillard High School, Fort Lauderdale, and Hayden Fry was there. Two grown men sitting there, standing up against a wall watching a girls' basketball game because the lady that coached the women's basketball is also the counselor. This kid who had no parents, so she was taking the place, so we had to wait.

So two grown men sitting there, watching that, and then my turn to go in and his turn to go in, trying to tell kids everything they want to hear. Very, very difficult to level with them. "Yes, you're good, and you're going to be a fine, maybe someday an All-American, maybe someday a pro, but you're not going to be able to make the team to start until your sophomore year." Gone. I mean if you level with them and tell them that.

So a lot of the guys tell them they're going to be All-World the first year, and they believe that. Quarterbacks, they all want to be doctors or engineers and they're all going to start their freshman year and they're all going to go to the NFL and sign a 15-million-dollar bonus. That's their dreams, which are great. So it's hard to really level with them when they're going to play and how they're going to play.

They know your roster. They know everybody on it. Recruiting, like this one kid that Michigan State's recruiting now from Louisiana, Sabin at LSU, he's got that big basketball. The

kid's from California, he's got that big basketball player from the Lakers, what's his name, the center?

Charnley: Shaq.

Perles: Shaq called him up, because he went to LSU. Shaq's got a job for him, which is illegal as hell. But you've got to put up with times when guys go overboard. You don't want to be in the position to start blowing whistles on people. They usually get caught themselves. But recruiting is not a lot of fun.

Dennis called them once a week, or if you want to talk to them more, then he's got to go to the coach's office and the coach calls you and then you talk to the coach and then the coach puts the kid on. A lot of traveling. It's hard. Recruiting is a tough job. The whole job is tough. Hell, they're on Bobby's ass, and he's only been in there one year and people want to criticize for winning five games. Hell, that's all I won my first year.

Charnley: How was it you selected him as an assistant?

Perles: Well, he had a reputation of being an excellent coach and recruiter. As it ended up, he was a better coach than I anticipated, even. He was super at that and also recruiting. He was a lot more than I anticipated. But the guy is a good coach, and he's been real fair with his--I know a lot about it because my son Pat is on the coaching staff. He's a good coach and a good recruiter. I think next year you'll see him have a pretty decent year.

Charnley: What do you think about the Steve Smith Academic Center for—

[Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

Charnley: --contributes, that's nationally. Steve Smith, God bless him. He just did another thing. He put up \$600,000 for a Pershing High School for a scholarship for a kid each year out of there, live off the interest. Steve is a very unique guy in what he's done and honored his mother, that's unusual. And the building is excellent. That's not going to do it; it's going to take more than a building and some computers to get these kids going, but it shows great support. It's a very big tool in recruiting.

There's still a few families out there that's got football in its right perspective, where they know that they can't eat it and it doesn't matter what they make and how high they go in the draft, they've got to make a living for themselves and they've got to be happy and they've got to get that education. That building is a symbol of the effort that the school's making and help those kids get through, because these kids, some of them aren't even close to being prepared, not even close. There's no way of hiding them. We don't have a curriculum where you can just go in there and hide.

When I went to school, we had a lot of Phys Ed majors. Physical education was easy for athletes. It was right up our alley. But that curriculum is so tough now. When I went to school, your tough courses were physiology, anatomy, kinesiology, statistics. Now it's not easy, and it's a lot tougher curriculum. A lot of our kids, maybe that's why they're policemen, went to police administration because may be a little easier than some of the other curriculums.

Charnley: In looking back on the football history of Michigan State since the time you first walked on campus, what do you see the role of football at the university today?

Perles: Well, you can't just talk about this. It's football nationally. Hard to justify some of the things we do in athletics if we're here for an education in higher education, how athletics are so strong. The reason they're so strong is because they bring so much publicity to the university, and it brings so much contributions from alumni, they're fickle over how important athletics are. That doesn't make it right, but there isn't anything we can do about it. We're only fighting fire with fire at Michigan State. It happens. The whole country is interested in winning football and basketball championships, realizing the contributions that come from it and the publicity that comes from it.

We've got ourselves in a real dilemma here. It has nothing to do with individuals, how they feel about it. But I can certainly say, how would I like to have gone to school and have a Ph.D. and worked and studied and done everything and be ranked at ninth on the payroll in the Big Ten and my basketball and football coaches are making a million dollars? They took games and methods of education and gymnastics and basketball and football courses. How are you going to justify that? So, it's hard.

Same token, the football coach said, "Yes, next year if I don't win, I'm going to be in the street, and he's still going to be there getting TIAA-CREF and having a good life." He's going to say, "Well, how about those profs that work eight hours a week and have office hours that they don't keep and have consulting positions where they use their secretaries and their copy machines and all that and write books?" So it's both ways.

But right now you're seeing my best years, because I've only been out six years. My last year, I was doing about 400,000, which is great. If I was in it today, I'd probably do a million two,

million three. That's only happened in the last five years. It made jumps every year, but then about four years ago it doubled. It will keep going higher and higher, because once schools is trying-- Oklahoma wins the championship, they want to make sure their coach is the highest-paid guy.

Maybe that's not answering your question, but college athletics are big because alumni make it big. They won't contribute if they lose. They won't contribute if they don't like the coach. It's just too bad. The whole thing stems from the universities needing key contributions. Anytime you give, you get your mouth in there, and that screws everything up. If we didn't need the contributions, we could run a straighter university, but we got to cater to who's got the cash. Some of these guys, when they have the cash and they cough it up, they want to name some coaches, they want their name on a building, they want this, they want that.

Then we've got board members that become fans, and they want their coach in, they want to win, they want to travel, they want to do all of the things. They want to have all the perks. They're fans. No room for a fan as a board member. If they were smart, someone would get up at their board meeting and say, "Let's make a resolution. We don't go to any game unless we pay our own way, and we go on our way. We don't go with the team. We don't go on the plane. We don't go on the train. We don't go on the bus. We go to the games, we buy our ticket, and we go."

But that's not the case, so now we end up with a whole bunch of fans on the board. Maybe the governor is right, maybe they ought to be appointed by the governor instead of elected, because the elections are a joke. All they do is write in on whoever's going to win the election, whoever's running for that party's part of it.

These universities are expensive. I always wondered why. I mean, I'm in the same boat as you. Probably, I brought this to Lu Anna [Simon] one time, how in the world can we have a retirement program where we put in 5 percent, and the State of Michigan puts in 10 percent, and we

don't have caps, and the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? The secretary making 20,000 gets 5 percent of nothing and 10 percent, and the president or the football coach gets 200,000 5 percent and 10 percent. We don't have caps. We don't have nothing. It looks like the rules are made by the people that are reaping the harvest. And the taxpayers don't know shit. But we have great retirement. It's the best there is. Only federal judges have it better.

Honhart: Sort of a perk for what we've paid for during the thirty years you're there.

Perles: Lu Anna says it's a perk because we don't get paid high enough. I asked her head-on when I was still working there.

Honhart: And that's what she said, right?

Perles: Exactly, exactly. But I have my good friend Larry Sierra, who runs intramurals, him and I were students here together. Now, Larry is thirty-five years, thirty-seven years, he's TIAA-CREF, he's a million four. Arlene over at radiology, she's about 700. She made, but he never made big salaries. He only became the director about ten years ago. Everybody seems to leave, at least if you've been here a reasonable amount of time, you're going to at least make what you were when you were working, if you subtract the things you don't have to contribute to and so on, which is a good deal. I mean I love it, but I can't believe the taxpayers let this shit slide through. Big-time retirement.

Charnley: If you look back on your years as football coach, what comes to mind in terms of reflecting on the Perles years at Michigan State University? Anything that stands out or that you'd like to be remembered by, at least in your own words?

Perles: Green blood, yes. I mean, this place made my life. I have kept in close touch with all my buddies I grew up with, a lot of them. Don't forget, when we went in the Army there was fifteen of us. I probably see, out of that fifteen, ten of them three or four times a year. I go down to their kids' weddings, and they come up here for my golf outing for Special Olympics.

They all had GI Bill, like I did. Not one of them went to college. Some worked at Cyclone Fence, putting up fence. Some worked at Tasty Bread, peddling bread. A lot of them worked at Ford Motor, either in the steel mill, hooker, or the foundry, Jerry Woods, or a few of them in the office as clerks. That's what I would have done, and I could have been very happy. They go golfing, they go to Florida, they do things that everybody else does.

But when I came up here, I saw that this was beautiful. This was leaving Verner Highway coming here, as long as I didn't turn my back on my friends back home. My friends have followed me from playing here to coaching at Dayton, to coaching at high school at St. Ambrose, to the Pittsburgh Steelers, coming to games. So I've been close to them the whole time, and they've taken advantage of the things that I've had to enjoy.

But when I went here, I said, "If I could just be an assistant football coach here and live here." Then when I had to think about leaving because Duffy was about ready to retire, and then Pittsburgh, I loved it when we won four Super Bowls, but still, there's always something missing, was Michigan State, being home.

Then when I got this job, I would have walked back, even though I was head coach of Philadelphia Stars. Miles Tannenbaum, that morning we had that brunch with him and he said, “We’re going to sue,” we sat down and he started threatening right away. I said, “Just a minute. I’ve got to make a call.” I went and called Doug Weaver. He was still at the hotel. I said, “These guys are threatening to sue,” I said, “I don’t know what to do.”

He said, “You want me to come down there and join arms with you?”

I said, “No, that’s all I needed. I have your backing.”

I went back to the table, I said, “Miles, I’m going. I’ll tell you one thing, I’m going to tip this table over and I’m walking home if I have to, but I’m going.” There was no money, there was nothing material-wise anybody could give me to keep me from coming back here.

When I went back to the hotel and Doug and I went to the airport, we got on the plane, I had time for one phone call. He was getting the tickets. I called Sally. I said, “Sally, we’re going home. We’re going home. I can’t talk now.” Hung up, and then we changed planes in Chicago. I had time for one call. I called my mother. She’s still living, ninety-three. I said, “Mom, I’m coming home. That’s all I can tell you right now.”

We came home to Grand Rapids. Eddie Rutherford picked us up. Doug and I got in the backseat. Eddie had a couple beers in the car. We went to Doug’s house and I stayed overnight. Then I went to Kellogg Center and had the press conference. We did that.

Then at the press conference Saturday, I went to Eddie Rutherford’s house, had lunch, he took me to the airport in Detroit, flew home, my wife picked me up, we went to downtown Pittsburgh at the fancy restaurant up at the top of one of the buildings. It was a going-away party they’d organized before for Sally and I going away to Philadelphia. We were going away, but a different place now. They all found out then.

I stayed home Saturday night, flew back in here Sunday, and started to work. It was the greatest thrill of my life, is being the head coach here, more so than winning the Rose Bowl or the Super Bowls, being the head football coach here.

I was lucky. It's hard to last twelve years. Some do it longer, but the average is a lot less than twelve. So I was glad and fortunate to have twelve years. When I was done here, I was never interested in coaching anymore or anyplace else.

So then they started the Motor City Bowl. Now I have the Motor City Bowl that I own and the Hula Bowl that I work for, and then I have the Special Olympics golf outing we've had for thirteen years now. That's what I do. I get up in the morning. I go to the Mac and swim and then put all that shit on and shave, watch T.V., read the paper, have a coffee, get dressed, and do a couple errands, see my mother at 10:30 at Bircham [phonetic]. Then go have lunch. Then by 2:00 o'clock, if I wasn't doing this, I'd be at the Sip and Snack playing gin, come home 4:00, 4:30. Then whatever she has to eat or go out to eat or what.

So I'm really having fun. I have the Bowl game, but I don't have to do a lot at this time of the year. It's like stealing. I probably only put in hard work from the Monday after Thanksgiving until we finish with the game the end of December. So I'm having a lot of fun. This is fun. This is like when I wrote my book. Did you ever see it? I wrote the book with the writer from *the Mad Armenian*, Bahi [phonetic].

Honhart: George Baha?

Perles: No, Bahi. He was out of St. Louis, St. Louis *Dispatch* or whatever paper it is. I hired someone neutral, because I didn't want to--I just wanted to do it that way. So we sat out in my

dining room for two weeks and I rattled off like this, just kept rattling, rattling, rattling. That sucker took it home and did it. It only took me about two weeks, about four hours a day. Of course, I've got all those notebooks there. Everything I did at Michigan State I kept a notebook on, one of those secretary books. I'd write everything down, and I've got a record of everything, way back to the Steelers, even. For some reason I kept all my books.

Honhart: We need to talk about that sometime for the archives.

Perles: Yes.

Charnley: I want to thank you on behalf of the project. We appreciate your perspective and all the things you shared. Thank you.

Perles: Glad to do it.

Charnley: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]

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