

Vince Dooley: A Conversation

Closed Caption Script

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Susan Hoffman:

His career unfolded over 40 years on a single campus where he made the Dawgs a national phenomenon. Vincent Joseph Dooley was born in Mobile, Alabama in 1932, the fourth of five children. As a young boy Dooley realized athletics could save him from a life in the shipyards. He became a basketball star at McGill Catholic High School but also played quarterback on the football team. At Auburn University an injury ended Dooley's basketball dreams but he excelled at football under coach Ralph "Shug" Jordan. After graduating with a degree in business management, Dooley spent two years in the US Marine Corps. The experience helped develop his coaching style. In 1956 Dooley became an assistant football coach at his alma mater where he also received a masters in history. Dooley's life changed forever in 1963 when he was named head football coach of the Georgia Bulldawgs. For the next 25 years he lead the team to national prominence winning 201 games, 6 southeastern conference championships and a Sugar Bowl. In 1979 Dooley became UGA's athletic director expanding the program and proving to be a consummate fundraiser. Dooley stepped down in 2004 ending a career marked by success, honors and some controversy. Far from retired he keeps busy pursuing his many passions including history, gardening and of course sports.

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Susan Hoffman:

Vince Dooley thanks so much for this conversation. It's a pleasure to have you.

Vince Dooley:

I'm delighted to be here and I'm looking forward to it.

Susan Hoffman:

Let me begin with this. You have been a successful student athlete, a successful football coach on the collegiate level, a successful athletic director. You if anyone would know can tell me, is it more important to be talented or to be determined to win?

Vince Dooley:

Well I think it's obviously a combination of both, I mean well certainly the talent has to be there but you also have to have the drive to really develop the talent to the maximum. And I think that's what it's all about drive and determination that really helps talent to flourish.

Susan Hoffman:

Let's go back. You were born in Mobile, Alabama in 1932. You were the fourth of five children. And you were a depression baby. What do you remember other than maybe putting cardboard in your shoes in your one and only pair of shoes? What do you remember of that era?

Vince Dooley:

Well what I remember was that I didn't think I was any different from anybody else that was growing up. I was bear footed. And yes if we did have that one pair of shoes that we had it was used on Sunday that if we had a hole in it you'd put cardboard in it. But we didn't think that was anything unusual. So I really as I said many times I didn't know that I had grown up in the depression until I read about it 20 years later. But it was a great experience. We had a wonderful life, good family. We did have food but there probably were some challenges without my parents that I really didn't know about.

Susan Hoffman:

You were a little wily, maybe a little short tempered, were you not?

Vince Dooley:

I did have a tendency to pop off kind of quick. And I think that it was one thing that my high school coach and I always feel like it as I look back the influence and help that I got not only from parents but next to my parents, my high school coach was probably one that I owe a great deal to. And part of that was him getting me, convincing me that if you're going to be an athlete, if you're going to do well you have to be able to control your emotions and control your temper and you have to do well in school.

Susan Hoffman:

You were very good at basketball, also noted for football but basketball and you actually say you kind of preferred to play basketball or you at least enjoyed the practicing over football...

Vince Dooley:

Basketball's much more fun than football. The only thing that's fun about football is scrimmaging and competing as a team. But basketball you're handling the ball all the time, you're shooting all the time, you're playing defense. I mean all of that is fun. It's a lot easier to practice basketball than it is football. And yes some people said I was probably better in basketball than football. Now I kind of take that well maybe I wasn't too good at football that was the case. But never the less I enjoyed both sports and I thought each sport complimented the other and it was helpful to me in each sport.

Susan Hoffman:

You must have been a very good athlete all around obviously but you did play quarterback as a sophomore in high school and you lead your team to a city championship. So you couldn't have been all bad in football.

Vince Dooley:

Well I always liked the idea of leadership. Even as a young person, I remember reading something about leadership and I think well that's good I want to be a leader. And I remember as a young kid maybe leading in the wrong direction. As an example when we had recess we would all run over to the boy's yard and play. And we ran over and there was this gate that was locked all of a sudden and I said alright guys over the top. So we went over the top and the gate crashed and then the nuns came looking for the person responsible. And they came to me and the one nun came to me and took me off and discussed it with me. And I said well I wanted to be a leader and that gate was locked and that's the only way I knew how to get over. They said well it's good to be a leader but you've got to learn to lead in the right way. And that was the first lesson I thought of good leadership.

Susan Hoffman:

You also learned a lesson when you were 6 years old. You said you were sitting in a barber shop and you watched a White man sitting in a barber's chair getting a shoe shine from a little Black boy. Tell me what happened.

Vince Dooley:

Well I was sitting there waiting my turn to have my hair cut and the White elderly man was just absolutely dehumanizing to the Black kid who was shining his shoes. And I think that maybe he was might have been intoxicated, whatever. But he just absolutely said things that really got me mad and I recall that I really regret that I didn't get up and do something. I don't know what I could have done because I was only 5 or 6 years old but I know I didn't like anybody being treated that way. And it had a lasting impression on me. And again the only regret that I had is that I didn't get up and say...

Susan Hoffman:

Say...

Vince Dooley:

Old man shut up, you shouldn't talk to anybody that way.

Susan Hoffman:

Obviously money was tight in your home but you did have a job in a meat market, correct, working in a butcher shop?

Vince Dooley:

That was my first job yea.

Susan Hoffman:

Tell me what happened to that money.

Vince Dooley:

Well I earned over a period of almost a whole summer and a whole year. And I would work sometimes at the school, \$52. My mother put it in the bank. And later on she took me to the dentist for the first time. And I think I had 16 cavities and had to have 2 teeth

pulled. And then I remember talking to my mother one time. I said mom I remember that \$52 that you put in the bank for me. And I said where is it. She said open your mouth. And I did. She said there is the \$52. And it was money well spent because it did really help me to get into good hygiene practice with my teeth.

Susan Hoffman:

It was an epiphany, a pivotal moment for you. Alright, so you played high school football and high school basketball. And you knew because you were probably not going to be able to go to college rather on your parent's dime you would probably have to get an athletic scholarship. And you said you looked at Alabama and Tulane but ultimately you chose Auburn. And the decision was made you could play both football and basketball.

Vince Dooley:

I did go and the reason I was able to go was because of football. I don't think had it not been for sports that I really would have gone to college.

Susan Hoffman:

You were the first in your family.

Vince Dooley:

Well my mom and daddy who really gave me great values, neither one of them finished grammar school. So there was no education, formal education in my family though I said many times that they probably gave me something much more valuable than a formal education with these good values that still remain with me, but never the less I was. And the reason I went was because of sports. But because of sports, after I got there, and I did what I had to do then learning became increasingly more important. And even to the day there is a great joy of learning and I still enjoy learning thanks to sports who really got me to college which gave me the education and the quest for learning which I carry on today.

Susan Hoffman:

You were hurt one year and so it ended your basketball career in college but you did do very well, under Coach Shug Jordan, who went onto be a man you ultimately beat. But tell me what did you learn from him?

Vince Dooley:

Well I think "DB" was known as a southern gentleman. He was always gracious. I learned perhaps the base of my philosophy about coaching from him. But I was very fortunate to be in an area where there were some other great coaches. And while I learned the base of my philosophy from him there was Bobby Dodd at Georgia Tech and there was Bear Bryant at Alabama, both very successful, both with contrasting styles. And what you would do would you would borrow from each one what you liked about one and what you liked about the other. And those were the two that I studied because of the fact that they were successful.

Susan Hoffman:

Tell me about the Marines. What was the takeaway for you? What did you learn during your time in the Marines.

Vince Dooley:

That's been a valuable part too, because again you go back to leadership, again that's always been something that's been very important to me. And I think that the Marine Corps provided me an opportunity to learn more about leadership, what leadership is all about. And so throughout my career I have drawn up my experience in the Marine Corps on many different instances and still do today. And so semper fi is always been extremely important to me.

Susan Hoffman:

You had the opportunity to stay on and actually travel the globe with the Marines and you chose not to, why?

Vince Dooley:

Well when I decided to, when it was time for me to make a decision and I had these options and one was as you just mentioned to be able to stay in the Corps, to go with a Colonel as his aid and to travel to a lot of places all over Europe and that was very exciting to me. I had other opportunities to go back home in the banking business. I had finished in business administration. And then I had an opportunity to be a high school coach which I didn't, I thought about that. But it was hard to turn down an offer at a very young age to go back to the institution, Auburn and to be an assistant coach. And so Coach Jordan, Shug Jordan was one of the first of his players that he brought back and started in the coaching profession. So it was a great great break for me, a great opportunity. I wasn't for sure that's what I wanted to do all of my life but it sounded exciting to give it a try and then see what happens.

Susan Hoffman:

Somewhere along the line you met your wife, Barbara. How did you meet her?

Vince Dooley:

Well we shared the same faith. We're both Catholics. And I was the faculty chairman of the Newman Center where the students would go. And I tell the story often that I looked out among the students and if any particular students needed counseling and advice more than Barbara I didn't know who it was. So I figured she was the one that really needed my counseling. And after four years of dating back and forth, and I say back and forth because we dated each other once an year for four years and finally for some reason the fourth year it took. It didn't take the first three. But in any event it's been 48 great wonderful years.

Susan Hoffman:

It was meant to be. Alright, you were an assistant coach and then you took over the freshman team. And you actually have said some people view taking over the freshman team as a demotion but you saw it as a ticket, why?

Vince Dooley:

Well I had an opportunity to leave and I had started a degree in history for my master's degree in history. I went back and virtually got another degree in history in order to qualify. But I really enjoyed history. So I had done all the class work, all the school work but I hadn't got done the thesis. And I hadn't finished that. And I think that kept me there. So I needed a change and so I went to the coach and asked Coach Jordan if I could have the Freshman team because I felt like that I had specialized so much, I coached the quarterbacks, that I'd like to be able to run a football team as a freshman. And back in those days the freshman teams were separate teams. They had a regular schedule. They played 5 or 6 games a year. And I liked that opportunity to further my coaching skills. And I think it was a help. Everybody looked at it as a demotion. But I felt like that's what I needed at the time. And I think it was very helpful to me when the opportunity came for me to be a head football coach.

Susan Hoffman:

Which came in 1963... You're given the head football coach at UGA. You're 31 years old. You're now married. You have two children. You have one on the way and you're going to leave your home Alabama and you're going to go to a rival UGA an untested freshman coach, again at 31. How did you pull that off?

Vince Dooley:

Well the great news is that happened. I said many times being an administrator which I was for many years there's no way I would have hired myself because my qualifications as you just pointed out, 31 years old, Freshman coach, at a rival school. And I was offered that job. That was not in my game plan.

Susan Hoffman:

And there were fans that didn't want you either.

Vince Dooley:

Well I would probably say as I look back on it Barbara and I think that we may be the only two that thought it was a good hire. But that's the beauty of youth. We didn't know any different. And that was the beauty of youth because all I knew was that we had to do a job, gain credibility and the way you gain credibility in coach is to win football games. And fortunately we won early. We put a great staff together and kept them together. And within three years we won a championship, within five we won another championship. So we got off to a good start. It was extremely important for me to get off to a good start.

Susan Hoffman:

Well let's talk, your very first game out of the box you lose terribly to Alabama, 31 to 3. Did you go oh dear god?

Vince Dooley:

Well it's amazing...

Susan Hoffman:

What have I done...

Vince Dooley:

No I kind of, I really felt like we were going to win because I had scouted them personally. But I got a real education in that first game came home and we did get beat 33 to 3 or whatever it was. And actually Coach Bryant, they were national champions, and Joe Namath was at quarterback. They really took it easy on us in the fourth quarter. But I get home at 3 o'clock in the morning and I sit down and take my shoes off and Barbara said how did it go? Well it really struck me funny, you know how did it go? You just got your tail kicked out of you on the very first game that you're starting and I just started laughing. How did it go? But it was a great education because it enabled me to make some decisions in that first game. I changed some coaches around, I changed some players around and we ended up being a very very good football team at the end of the season.

Susan Hoffman:

You finished 7-3-1 that year.

Vince Dooley:

Yea, and went to a bowl and that was the first time in a while...

Susan Hoffman:

And you won...

Vince Dooley:

That we went. And it was almost like we had won and gone to the Sugar Bowl because everybody was happy. And I think that I was very pleased with our great start and a lot of it had to do with us getting our tail kicked early in the first game.

Susan Hoffman:

Early on... You have admitted that you really had to grow into the job that when you first started there was a whole lot. You had to be flexible. You had to be nimble. You had to be smart. You had to be quick. But you acknowledge that you didn't start out stellar.

Vince Dooley:

Well I don't think you ever get to that point because it's always a process of learning and recommitment every four or five years where you recommit to another 4 or 5 years. I mean you go through what I call a series of crises. And you will have those crises when you're in a profession that is as high profile as sports is as college football is in this state as an administrator that you're going to go through crises on the field or off the field. And I think it's important to be able to somehow survive those crises. And we certainly went through them and fortunately we were able to survive those crises and stay at one place for 40 years which I'm very proud of. And it's very difficult today in this day and time.

Susan Hoffman:

Nearly impossible to do what you have done. I'm going to ask you some very basic questions and there are many people that are watching that are going to know the answers to these questions but I want everybody to enjoy Vince Dooley and the success that you've had. Who is your best player ever coached?

Vince Dooley:

Well the most productive player without a doubt was Hershel Walker because what he did in 3 years is just absolutely amazing.

Vince Dooley:

Some would say actually that it is Hershel Walker that put Vince Dooley on the map. What do you say to those naysayers?

Vince Dooley:

Well I think that he along with about 150 other players did. You know Hershel came along at a great time. And he would be the first to tell you that Hershel had a great supporting cast which helped him to be a great player.

Susan Hoffman:

Be specific, what is it about Hershel Walker that was so good? What was the combination?

Vince Dooley:

Well I said that what separated him from all that I've ever seen one he had an incredible speed. He was a world class sprinter. Secondly, he had great strength, primarily just through push ups. But thirdly he had tremendous self discipline. He was the most self disciplined and mentally tough football player that I've ever seen. So I've never seen a player that combined those three in one package and that's what separated Hershel from all the others.

Susan Hoffman:

Best team?

Vince Dooley:

Well the 1980 team won them all. We had a saying throughout that season one more time because that team every week was challenged and found a new way to win a football game. It could have been the offense one week, the defense, the kicking game, something incredible would happen and they just kept winning and they kept winning and they kept winning. So they won them all. Now they were the only team in the country that won them all. And you could argue well their offense is not that good and their defense is not that good but you can't dispute the record they were undefeated. And so they were the best from that standpoint. And there were a lot of other great teams we had.

Susan Hoffman:

Sweetest victory, the National Championship?

Vince Dooley:

Well again, yea you could look back and think of some of the great victories but when you climax that season with a win that makes you the National Champions because that's what you want to be. You want to be recognized as the undisputed best there is in the business. And in 1980 we were.

Susan Hoffman:

Worst defeat, most stunning defeat?

Vince Dooley:

Well at a particular time you think this is the most stunning or that's the most stunning. I remember getting beat by Vanderbilt up in Nashville and that was a tough loss. Losing to Georgia Tech in 1974 was as bad as it gets because not only was the game so bad but the conditions were bad. It was about a 40 mile an hour wind. There was sleet. There was rain. It was wet. It was cold. And we got our tails kicked from the opening kick off; in fact I made a very wise decision. I remember that because of all this bad weather we were going to let Georgia Tech have the ball. So we kicked to them and they fumbled and got it back on the 12 yard line and I was thinking how smart I was. 16 plays later they went into the in zone with a touch down and they never stopped. But the great thing about that is that there's next year. And next year we had them 35 to nothing at half time in Grant Field.

Susan Hoffman:

Many coaches are judged by how they do against the biggest rivals. Your record against Georgia Tech, 19 and 6; your record against Florida, 17, 7 and 1, sweet... Auburn not as sweet, but those two sweet.

Vince Dooley:

Well the toughest thing I had to do as a coach was to play Florida and Auburn back to back. And I think that affected the record we had. We almost split even. They had...

Susan Hoffman:

Just so everybody knows, 11, 13 and 1 was your record against Auburn.

Vince Dooley:

Yea, that's right. But we cinched 5 championships on the plains of Auburn. So that was extra special despite the fact that the record was not as good as I would like to have it. But never the less we did pretty well overall.

Susan Hoffman:

Alright, I want to share with you what some of your players have said about you; not personal, somewhat aloof, but always in charge, always in touch; unmistakable presence, commands respect, in order to be on time you're early. Fair?

Vince Dooley:

Well, yea, I think I can be accused of not being as personable but at the same time I think that you try to evaluate yourself and see if you can be a little better at what you're not so good at. And I've tried to be a little bit better, be a little more personable.

Susan Hoffman:

In fairness, those that have said this have said that they have over time that you did get more comfortable and that Marine Corps mask if you will soften.

Vince Dooley:

Yea, I think it may have tempered as we went along. I never, I never got away from the basics of what I felt strongly about the Marine Corps. But I felt like you could also be nice and say no.

Susan Hoffman:

Tell me this, you integrated the football program essentially at UGA in 1971 and you recruited your first Black athletes. And I understand that you did it well. Didn't always feel completely comfortable or confident you were doing it the right way and it took you a season or two to get comfortable but what was going on behind the scenes, and in your heart and in your mind and among your coaches about what you knew you needed to do?

Vince Dooley:

Well there was no question that we needed to recruit some Black players. And we actually signed 5 that particular year. And it was a great diverse of Black athletes. You had one that was very skeptical about coming, wasn't so sure, wasn't sure how that person was going to be treated. You had another one, Larry West from down in Albany, Georgia who was totally confident that he was going to be treated right. And I told him, I said you know I'm going to treat you like, my goal is to treat you like I treat my son. He said Coach I have no, I have no qualms about coming. And then you have one that was bright and he was a little bit radical. You had another that was just everything was great. 5 of them all different but all made a contribution. So you can't just classify them all into one as one type. They were all diverse individuals, all Black. And they all did well.

Susan Hoffman:

I understand in talking to some players that it really among the players that it didn't matter skin color, it just mattered who could get the job done.

Vince Dooley:

I think that's exactly what you went in to. When you first started coaching Blacks you wasn't sure. And maybe you tried to in some ways go be overly understanding. And I think we learned a lesson from that. And once we just treated everybody the same and not see color it was very easy to coach.

Susan Hoffman:

In 1979 you decided to also become Athletic Director and there was a time and place when that was easy to do and it was quite common. And then in 1985 you thought you know what I might run for US Senate and you dismissed the idea. Then in 1988 you thought you know what I think I might run for Governor but you ultimately decided against running for Governor why?

Vince Dooley:

On both occasions I decided that I was happy doing what I was doing. And you need to be totally happy. I never woke up and felt good about turning to politics. And I know that I made the right decision.

Susan Hoffman:

Was it hard to give up football?

Vince Dooley:

Well not when the time came because I was very fortunate to have done everything that I wanted to do in coaching. I did everything. And I left when I wanted to leave, under the conditions that I wanted to leave. And once that took place I never looked back, never regretted anything because I did it all that I wanted to do and left when I wanted to leave.

Susan Hoffman:

You went on, you stayed on as Athletic Director. You obviously again your last season was 1988 but you stayed on as Athletic Director until 2004. Let's look at your span as Athletic Director. Things were not always rosy. People did not always agree with some of your hires. They didn't particularly believe that you should have hired Ray Goff and he had you know some fits and starts and ultimately was released in the mid '90s. Some questioned the hiring of Ron Jirsa in basketball and left after a couple of seasons. You also were called on academics. Jan Kemp who was an English teacher in the developmental studies program in the '80s, a program that assisted athletes and others who couldn't make the riggers of the institution came forward and she said athletics is exploiting student athletes and passing kids that have no business being in school. And it was a huge national story. What happened from your perspective behind the scenes? And was it a good thing in the end?

Vince Dooley:

80, 85 percent of what she was talking about was no basis what so ever, but 15 percent of what she was talking about had a basis. And we looked into it. And I think if people had listened to her instead of stonewalling her that it might have happened as bad as it did. But never the less there were great things that came out of it. And what we decided we were going to do, we're not going to try to answer all of the charges but how can we make this program better as a result of what we went through. And when we took that attitude we became a much better program over all and still are today as a result of that.

Susan Hoffman:

You left the AD's position with numerous national championships, 75 conference championships, as an athletic director many would argue you were just as successful as

an AD as you were as a football coach, unfortunately after the decades of dedication to the University President Michael Adams in 2003 said he wasn't going to renew your contract as athletic director. And that has left a sour taste in your mouth, not for the University but perhaps for that decision because you didn't get to go out the way you had hoped you could.

Vince Dooley:

Well I didn't, it was certainly first of all his right to make that decision. I had hoped to stay on a few more years because I had a few more things I wanted to get done. But he wanted to make the change and so I accepted that and he has every right to make that change. I just didn't agree with him.

Susan Hoffman:

Do you have any regrets?

Vince Dooley:

Sure everybody has regrets, because...

Susan Hoffman:

With one do over what would it be?

Vince Dooley:

Well when you coach as many games and make as many decisions as I have made both as a coach and as an administrator how could you not have some regrets. I mean you couldn't make every decision 100 percent, you just hope that you make the greatest majority of them right. And I think I did in most part. But those when I made some mistakes, yea I'd like to have a chance to do those over again, but unfortunately not.

Susan Hoffman:

Last question, will you be judged fairly?

Vince Dooley:

Sure, I think so. Yea, I think so for the most part. I think for the most part I will be.

Susan Hoffman:

Alright, very good, thank you very much Vince Dooley it's been a pleasure to have you.

Vince Dooley:

My pleasure, thank you...

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CREDITS

Male VO:

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