

***John Wolda, Rice University 1956:***

After graduating from Reagan High School in Houston, John Wolda received one baseball scholarship. Fortunately, it was from his school of choice. He enrolled at Rice in 1952.

Playing sports at Rice requires a great amount of time, attending classes and studying. How did you balance this?

I actually made better grades in the spring because I didn't have time for anything else.

Who were some of your teammates at Rice?

The late Carl Reynolds, whose father played Major League Baseball against Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig; the late Billy Arhos, the founder and executive producer of Austin City Limits; Matt Gorges, my "roomie", who was an all-SWC guard on the 1953 football team and a Bob Quin Award recipient; Jerry Sims, my catcher and three-time all-SWC and a guy named Tommy Reckling.

Who was your coach?

Dell Morgan, a rugged West Texan who was a Texas Tech Hall of Famer. He was killed in a tragic auto accident. In his honor, the late Carl Reynolds, the late Herbie Chabysek and I created the Dell Morgan Award in 1973 for the Baseball MVP.

Any funny stories about the team?

"Bermuda Shorts" became popular back then. On a trip to SMU, Carl and I decided to wear shorts. I was the last to get on the bus. Coach Morgan saw me and said "you better have some long pants in your suitcase, if you're gonna be a man you got to dress like a man". I looked over at Carl and he was wearing long pants. Funny now, not then.

Since the '50s, there have been a lot of changes, notably Reckling Park. What was it like back then?

It was called Rice Field. In 1953, a scoreboard with balls and strikes was installed along with a press box and a chain link fence around the field. All day games – we had no lights. We had just one uniform – a gray, baggy wool uniform, which was unbearable in late spring.

You mentioned you were the football manager for the '53 team which went to the Cotton Bowl and were standing next to Coach Neely when Dicky Moegle was tackled off the bench. What was his reaction?

He was very upset but I will not quote him. We won the game, 28-6. Bart Starr was the 'Bama QB.

You played high school ball with two Rice coaches. Who were they?

Doug Osburn was the first. We played on the '50 and '51 teams. He played for UH and went to the College World Series in 1953. He coached Rice from '63-'80.

Wayne Graham was a sophomore on our '52 State Championship team. He was the star of the team the next two years. I have always said "Wayne is one of the five greatest competitors I've ever known and I don't remember the rest".

**What are the most memorable highlights of your Rice career?**

Being the winning pitcher twice for the freshman and twice for the varsity against UT. Back then, we called them "the yellow bellies".

**You were of small stature – how were you described in writeups?**

Diminutive, tiny, pint-sized, gutty, "pony", crafty little chunker and, of course, Little John.

Because of my skinny legs, a Baylor player hollered "Do your legs swell up that big every spring?" I guess I should have worn my pants low like they do today.

**Your father-in-law was a Rice chemistry professor, right?**

Yes, I took two years of Chemistry from him. He was the Athletic Director in 1934 when the Owls won their first SWC football championship. Near the end of my second year, his daughter, Harriet, and I started dating. We've been married for 63+ years.

**What advice would you give to players today?**

Chase your dreams and never give up.

**What was or has been one of the most influential people in your life?**

My mother. Her favorite saying was "Remember who you are and where you came from".

