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## Interview with Calvin Hatfield

Melissa Straus

Calvin Hatfield

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Melissa Straus

Interview with Calvin Hatfield

Middle Ground, Gambier

**Co-Workers present:** None

**Melissa:** (People talking in background) So this is Melissa Straus and I'm here with Calvin Hatfield and it is February 17<sup>th</sup> around 4 o'clock—I think it's the 17<sup>th</sup>—and this is an interview about Friday night football. Alright, so, um, yeah, so how, how long have you lived in—do you live in East Knox, or...

**Calvin:** Yeah, I live in Apple Valley, which is, um—do you need me to explain what Apple Valley is, or...

**Melissa:** (Laughs) I mean, actually yeah, go ahead.

**Calvin:** Okay, so Apple Valley is kind of a residential development within, um, Howard. It's fairly recent, it was built in the 70s, um, and it's a little bit different housing than most, most of our county, or at least our school district.

**Melissa:** Okay. So do you students, um, who live in Apple Valley, they go to East Knox?

**Calvin:** Yeah, um, a lot of the East Knox population comes from Apple Valley, uh, we've actually grown two districts since Apple Valley was really introduced. We used to be a Division Six group, which would be the smallest, uh, now we're division four, division five, we're kind of on that border every year.

**Melissa:** Okay. And is that for, like, every school or just for football?

**Calvin:** That's just for football. Each sport kind of adjusts to a little bit different numbers.

**Melissa:** Okay, um, I've heard that the, that the divisions were changing, or...

**Calvin:** They are, they're talking about changing them. Um, they're maybe splitting up division one, which would be the biggest, but that will certainly not affect us being a pretty rural area with a small population.

**Melissa:** Okay. Um, so, uh, how long have you been a football coach?

**Calvin:** I've been working and coaching in East Knox for three years now. Um, this is my second year as the head coach.

**Melissa:** Okay. Um, and, so what, what made you want to become their coach there.

**Calvin:** Um, that would be a long question to answer. Um, but really for me, to, to give you a short version of it, you know, football's always been a very important part in my life, it's something I've been very passionate about and cared a lot about. Um, and teaching is something I got into right out of school, right after I graduated I taught at the high school for two years, coached at college for three years and decided that high school is where I wanted to be, and um, in an area like East Knox where, um, certainly the kids didn't have a lot of advantages and I thought, you know, football can be something with a very positive impact on their lives.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Um, where did you grow up?

**Calvin:** I grew up in Maine, um, kind of moved around there a little bit, but very close to Portland. Um, but my dad actually grew up in Mansfield, which is, was a little more urban when he was around there, but it's about 45 minutes from here.

**Melissa:** Oh okay. Um, so I'm kind of interested in looking at football in terms of—or like the games—

**Calvin:** Mhmm.

**Melissa:** --in terms of how they affect the community, um, and so I was wondering if, like you could describe a typical game for me in terms of, like, the atmosphere and the crowd and...

**Calvin:** Our atmosphere—and honestly I don't pay too much attention to it now because I, I got more important things to think about on Friday—but I remember actually when I was a student here I went to an East Knox game, probably my freshman year of college was the first time I went over there and we had a game the next day, nothing else to do on a Friday night, um, and went over to East Knox and, you know, I grew up where a game of football is important but it's not a big deal, and, you know, you could tell how passionate everyone was there, you know, the crowd was very big for such a small town, you know, a lot of people excited about the game, very excited about the team, and that's something that, you know, what was very impactful for me. It was, you know, it was something special, obviously it was important to them.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Um, do you think that's changed at all since you started coaching?

**Calvin:** I think, um, you know, since then East Knox has been (inaudible) from the eighties to the nineties it was really, really good and that, you know, after about 1997 it really hit it off football-wise, and it had a little bit of a resurgence the year, you know, my freshman year they were alright, they probably won four games which is pretty good for them, um, I don't think football has become any less important but I think that the crowd has become less excited certainly, it's, it's, you know, struggling.

**Melissa:** Okay. Do you—has it affected attendance at all?

**Calvin:** I think attendance has probably gone down some, um, you know, maybe we've lost, you know, ten percent from a good year to a bad year, but you know, people show up regardless of how the team's doing.

**Melissa:** Okay. And um, has the football team's, like, size—because I, I know that, I was talking to Eric Helt, I'm not sure if you know him—

**Calvin:** Yeah, I know Eric, I don't know him that well, but he's a good guy.

**Melissa:** Oh okay, yeah, and he was talking about how the pay-to-play has affected the team's size.

**Calvin:** Absolutely, mhmm. From my first year, which was the last year of no pay-to-play, um, to last year, which was the first year of pay-to-play, we lost, you know, we went from a team of forty-six to a team of, probably thirty-five, thirty-two at the end of the year. Um, and that, and that really, really, you know, affects our team, you know, a lot of kids that are going to be on the border, you know, they want to play football, but, "I'm not good enough, I might not see the field very much," you know, in a community like ours where money is pretty tight for a lot of families, it's, it's a decision-maker for them.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Has it affected the teams that you play against as well?

**Calvin:** Yeah, I think, you know, we are, a lot of schools certainly in our area and our conference are in tough financial situations. Our school has been trying to pass the levy for two years straight. We've been, you know, failing through that over and over. Financially we're probably about a year ahead of everybody else in our schedule, but if, um, you know, there is pay-to-pay in a lot of schools, and anywhere it's not it's going to be there shortly.

**Melissa:** Um, does the—has the community tried to do anything to get more students, um, on the teams, like, are they helping them our financially or...

**Calvin:** For our basketball team, actually this year I believe and I don't know this for sure, but we had, um, you know, a community member who wanted to see our team do well, it was a big supporter of the school who said, "Hey, you know, anybody comes out, no matter what happens, like, me and, you know, a couple of my friends are going to take care of all those participation fees," and our basketball teams here actually had a freshmen team, a JV team, and a varsity team, and we usually never have that freshman team, so...

**Melissa:** That's really good. Um, so, I guess, I know that you're really focused on the game itself, but I was wondering if you had any thoughts on how—I mean, you already talked about how, um, you saw the community really come together when you went to the first—

**Calvin:** Mhmm.

**Melissa:** --game, but um, how else do you see it—like the Friday night football games impact the community?

**Calvin:** I think, um, it makes how the football teams performs affects our entire town, it really does. Um, on Thursday, you know, yesterday, we had parent-teacher conferences and a big staff meeting before that, um, and in our staff meeting we were talking about, “Hey our school’s struggling,” you know, there’s not a lot of pride in our building from teachers, students, parents, whoever it is. Um, you know, a lot of people talk bad about our town, talk bad about our school, and what are ways for, what are things we can do to fix that? How can we address it? And, you know, mainly as a football coach I’m thinking, *I really hope no one says, you know, we need to start winning football games*, ‘cause I’m going to go and (inaudible) them if they do that, but uh, we’re trying. But in my mind I think if we win more games, our kids are proud of they’re from, our community is proud of where they’re from. Um, it, it could have a huge, huge impact, um, and I think I just talked about what was in my mind instead of answering your question, so sorry.

**Melissa:** No, no. That’s good. Um, so do you think that, like, maybe a student who goes to East Knox but is not on the football team, like that would also impact their own—

**Calvin:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I think, you know, from the band to the kid who doesn’t do anything, you know, they’re going to be proud of themselves, um, you know, if that happens. We get real proud of our team, it could be a great impact.

**Melissa:** Um, so, do you play other schools that are just within Knox County?

**Calvin:** Yeah, we play, no just Knox County, but you know, within our conference, uh which is actually closing next year, uh, but we’ll play Danville, who’s obviously close by. Utica, I think is in Licking County, but they’re, you know, our next-door neighbors, they’re touching us. Um, North Ridge would be Licking County, Johnstown would be Licking County. Um, not Mount Vernon, no, they’re too big for us.

**Melissa:** Oh, okay. So, when the conference closes next year, how will that affect—

**Calvin:** That’s been a very worrisome thing, and really what’s happened is for purely financial reasons with all the schools having problems, they’re looking for less travel times for some schools, um, so we will be joining a new conference, uh, as long as we’re voted in on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, uh, that will be with Fredericktown and Centerburg, who are in the current conference, and we’d be joining the Marion County League or (inaudible) the Morrow County League. So, they’ll be close by but there will be more travel for us. We’re going to be on the outskirts instead of the dead center of the conference.

**Melissa:** Okay. Um, do you think that’ll affect attendance from fans?

**Calvin:** I think the biggest thing that matters, and really the biggest thing, if you look at our local schools East Knox and Danville are rivals. I don't know how much you've heard about them but the Devil-Dog game is the biggest thing in both communities. Um, and we're going to be—we were invited into this conference, but Danville has not been at this point. Um, which I think if we start to not play Danville every year, and I can't see that happening, I think that would really affect our attendance. Uh, but, I, I think that as long as East Knox is throwing a football out in the field, a lot of the community will show up with a lot of support for them.

**Melissa:** Okay. Um, so what—do you know which conference Danville will end up in? Or...

**Calvin:** Danville is homeless right now. Which is the situation we were in, um, we were kind of—Danville, East Knox, Centerburg, Fredericktown are all close and we all agreed we're going to stay together no matter what because some of the Licking County schools said they're going to leave and stay closer to their home base, um, and then after those four schools “Well we're a pack, we're staying together no matter what,” this conference that hopefully we'll be joining invited Centerburg and Fredericktown, but not East Knox and Danville, and those schools couldn't say no because they needed someplace to go, um. So now, we're now in the same situation a year after the schools were, we're going to be leaving because we can't afford to say no. Danville is, they're going to have a tough time, they're in a bad spot.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Well, that's really unfortunate to hear and I hope it work out. But, um, I guess going back to the games themselves, or even before the games, how, how do you see the community preparing for a Friday night game?

**Calvin:** Um, I, if, for me, I'm not out in the town a lot during Friday, but in our school building you know it's game day from, you know, the class, things our kids show up, you know, our players show up wearing their high school jerseys and walk around and they're all proud of themselves and it's just a very different feel during the day, you know, for teachers, the questions they ask me, to, you know, how our players, our cheerleaders are even acting during the day. You can tell they're, you know they've got more important things than school on their mind to them. Uh, and so it's definitely a very different, things start getting tenser, I guess, with them, you know, Thursday afternoon. Uh, you know, there are a number of people who have spent their entire lives in this town, and, they're around the program a lot, you know, East Knox football is what they know, what they love. And, you know, you see them at Grillers, or you know, the sort of restaurant in town and, you know, Friday's a different meal from Thursday's meal for them—it is the thing that they are thinking about, that they are talking about.

**Melissa:** Do, like, so um, is there like, a generational component to it? Like, do you see like, the same family's on the teams, like the father's, the son's—

**Calvin:** Absolutely, um, you know, the—before I came in, um, I mean the guys who I worked for my first few years as an assistant, there was a group of coaches, one guy was

the head coach for thirty-five years straight, and the other guy was an assistant for twenty-seven years and was the head coach for maybe five years after that, and they had coached fathers, to son, and now, you know, it's nephews coming up and it's all these family names that everybody knows. Um, you know one of the things about being a rural community is, you know, not a big place with a lot of emphasis on high academics and going off somewhere to college, is these people stay in town. Um, so, it's the guys from the 80s from when the teams were really, really good and the 90s, it's their kids now. And, you know, they remember their high school experience, winning all these football games and, uh, now it's time for their son or their nephew to go and play, so (laughs), there's definitely—and they have their opinions and they're definitely around a lot.

**Melissa:** That's really cool. Um, do you—I mean if you ever get a good look at the stands, who, who is there, the people that make up the fanbase?

**Calvin:** It's not just parents, for sure, um, I think, I mean obviously parents are going to be there, but there is, you know, really the people that have been in the town for a long time are the people who fill up stands, and they're coming every year, you know, and it's not that they have any family on the team, it's just, they're there because that's what's so important to them, um, you know, I talked a little bit about—I'm from Apple Valley, I don't think Apple Valley pours into our stadium because it's a lot of people who have moved in and work in Columbus, things like that and they don't, they don't have the ties to the community. It's the old families, the people who live in Howard, people who live in Bladensburg, uh, you know, who are there every week.

**Melissa:** Okay. Um, are there any traditions at the games themselves that have been carried on through the years?

**Calvin:** Uh, honestly, we don't have anything that cool (laughs) uh, we really don't. We... built, uh, a victory bell, so the boosters bought us something we're supposed to ring, but that was (laugh) last year was the first year we had it, we only won one ball game, so (laughs) that tradition's not off to a great start.

**Melissa:** Um, do you think that having these games connects the county as a whole by having, you know, people from different towns come together at the same game, or does it create divisions within the counties?

**Calvin:** I think that there's, there's a great connection, particularly against East Knox-Danville, since they're so closely related. Um, there's a great connection between us, and there's a huge division at the same time. Um, I think, honestly, there is probably more ill-will created than anything good, um, until you start talking, you know, to somebody from another town and then all of a sudden—if it's Utica or somebody from Licking County or Mount Vernon, you know East Knox fans that will fight each other, kill each other, and then as soon as an outsider comes in they'll be, you know, partners, tag team up, no problem. Uh (laughs), so, it's good for us and bad for us.

**Melissa:** Yeah, that's really interesting. So, I remember—I think it was Derick who was telling me about how there was that—there was a road between Danville and East Knox...

**Calvin:** Mhmm. Yeah, uh, it's—so it's Howard-Danville Amnity Road, so East Knox is in Howard and Danville is obviously in Danville, and, you know, my first year there, um, you know, we're travelling to Danville, and, you know, this is the biggest thing, and I guess if you're going to talk about traditions, you know, Thursday night before the Devil-Dog game, now it's Friday night before the Devil-Dog games because we play on Saturday, there's a big bonfire, and you know, we'll through these little Devils into the fire (laughs), you know, burn 'em all up, and then the kids will go on what they call the Snake Walk through town, um, where they just kind of weave in and out of all of the small village of Howard. Uh, through all the streets. Um, so, you know, we have, you know, a bonfire the night before and then we get up, go through school—or I guess, no school that day, you know, a long day Saturday, waiting for the game to roll around, get in our drive and—kids will already start to hear about how there's been a lot of stuff spray painted on Howard, uh, Road. Howard Danville Amnityville Road, and it's, you know, a place that a lot of the kids have heard about, but no one's seen it, and as we go it's just all sorts of, you know, every sign's been painted, the road's been painted, I don't know how no one got ran over other than no one drives in these roads 'cause we're in the middle of nowhere. Um, but all sorts of, "Beat the Devils," and derogatory things about individual kids in our team, um, which is, you know, it's, it's not a bad thing, um, similar things were probably in poor taste that were painted, but uh, I think, you know, it shows that they care for certain.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Um, so wait, for the Snake Walk, they—do they, like, say anything when they're walking?

**Calvin:** No, there's no chant or anything like that, and actually the school used to sponsor it, um, but we're really trying to cut down on it since it's kids running around on the road trying to get run over, um, it's not really that safe so it's no longer a school sponsored event. Uh, but, but that's been something that's been going on for probably, you know, fifty years. You know, we've tried to get rid of it but we can't stop...

**Melissa:** Um, and how, how do you think that the, like the cheerleaders and the band contribute to the atmosphere?

**Calvin:** Our band certainly, you know, they're loud and they're—the band has it's own group of following, uh, just like the football team does. Like the band parents and people in the community who were part of the band, you know, that's a real big thing for them, you know, those people show up just to hear them play. Um, and I think the kids take a lot of pride in that and their parents take a lot of pride in it. And then the cheerleaders, uh, you know, they're—cheerleaders are a good thing and a bad thing for us. They (laughs), you know, they can be a distraction for a lot of our players, but, you know, they certainly—they're there to support our kids, their coaches are great, their parents are great, um, and, you know, they do a lot for us. They kind of spoil our players sometimes



during the week, you know, giving them candy and things like that, that I'd like held back a little bit, but it's all good.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Um, do you think that, um, I just lost my train of thought... well actually, do you think that the football players see themselves as kind of like a, oh, what's the word I'm looking for, like an ambassador for the school?

**Calvin:** I would like them to see that a lot more than they do, um, you know, these are, you know, fifteen to eighteen year old kids who have, you know, they don't have the big picture thoughts a lot of the time. Um, I don't think they recognize how important they are, um, but I um, you know, I certainly know that if, there are fifteen kids, you know, out some night in the off season doing something dumb, you know, ringing doorbells and running away or whatever it is, and one of them's a football player, you know, it's, the football team is out doing this dumb event, and I don't think the kids realize that.

**Melissa:** Yeah.

**Calvin:** The town certainly sees it that way, (laughs) um but, that's something, you know, I really try to impress upon them, but they're young, they don't get it quite yet.

**Melissa:** Yeah. It reminds me of my high school.

**Calvin:** Yeah, well.

**Melissa:** Um, well, I guess—are there, is there anything else that you would want to talk about or that you would, think would be important to add to how the games contribute—like, how they really are a part of the community?

**Calvin:** Uh, I think—now this was something I was thinking about the other day, you know, yesterday we had parent-teacher conferences, like I mentioned before, um, and this was the second week in the row where we're having those on Thursday nights. The first Thursday within our school we had no parents show up for parent-teacher conferences. Uh, and then last night we had maybe five, if we're lucky. Um, so I was talking to some teachers about that and we were talking about taking in pride in the school, taking pride in the town thing and, um, I think, we don't have a lot of people showing up for stuff like that but we have a lot of people showing up on Friday nights, it just kind of shows how important football is to the town. Um, I don't think that's necessarily a good thing—it doesn't show something pleasant about us, but it shows, you know, what parents, what the community really cares about right now.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Um, so you're an English teacher, too?

**Calvin:** Yeah, yeah I teach to the sophomore year English.

**Melissa:** Oh okay. Alright, and so you're used to more people, I guess, even the parents value the football program more than...

**Calvin:** Yeah, um, absolutely they do. Uh, I had one parent come in last night and he was there to talk to me about football—he didn't come in because he wanted to talk about what his kid was doing in English class, that's for sure.

**Melissa:** Do you think that it's, like, um—have you talked to any parents about, like, this decision—the participation of the sport and, or like, um, you know, like compared to...

**Calvin:** I haven't talked to like, are you talking about the fees, or what's more important, academic or football?

**Melissa:** Yeah.

**Calvin:** Um, I've had that conversation. Usually, you know, 'cause we certainly don't win enough football games, um, in anybody's mind, you know, I talked to a fair amount of parents about that, not always fun conversations. Um, and certainly, usually when a parent wants to come talk to me it's because their sons being—I'm doing something bad to their kid, you know, he's not playing and he should, and you know, a lot of times if a kid gets benched, for our team it's because you did something dumb in school, you were acting like an idiot in science class, or whatever it was. Um, and to explain that, look, your kid—you know, talking about being an ambassador before—if your kid doesn't get why he's acting like an idiot, um, but you're kid is being disrespectful in our class, he doesn't get to play in the first half of the game. And that conversation does not go very well 'cause, again, in the parents' eyes football is more important than art class or English class or whatever it is. Um, and so yeah, we have that conversation, but usually I'm saying one thing and parent's saying one thing and we're not on the same page (laughs).

**Melissa:** Do you get, like, a lot of outsider advice from like, fans that aren't parents? Do other people come up to you and like, give you suggestions, or...

**Calvin:** I get comments, yeah, um (laughs) you know, everybody, everybody knows better. Um, and so yeah, I get plenty of feedback. And some of it is actually good stuff, but, everybody has their idea of what should happen and probably seventy-five percent of them aren't afraid to voice their opinion (laughs).

**Melissa:** Do you, I mean, is, like, the picture that I'm getting is that this is such an event—like, the community's so involved in these games that, when people come up to talk to you about them, do you feel like, like you kind of have to, you know, listen to everything and humor everyone?

**Calvin:** I try to listen to everyone, um, and, you know, be maybe more polite than I feel like it at the time, but you know, a lot of that stems from not what I naturally want to do, but I talked a little bit before, we had a thirty-five year head coach and his assistant, those guys got run out my first year here, um, because a community group, you know, there were people running around signing petitions, doing all the stuff saying, you know, "These guys gotta go, their too old fashioned, they're not good enough anymore," um,

and, you know, I don't want that to happen to me, so yeah, I listen to a lot of different things even if, uh, I don't want to.

**Melissa:** Yeah. Okay, well, I mean I think I have a pretty good idea, a better idea of what the games are like. I mean, do you have any last comments you would like to say?

**Calvin:** Um, no, I mean, you've probably been to maybe a Kenyon game or something like that, a Kenyon football game—

**Melissa:** Yeah.

**Calvin:** --which is incredibly different. Um, you couldn't have, you know, bigger opposites, really, then a Kenyon football game and an East Knox game, you know. Half the Kenyon campus is hungover, don't wanna go see the game, whatever it is, don't care, and then for us, you know, we are, you know, we are the focus of the town for the day.

**Melissa:** Well thank you very much.

**Calvin:** Thank you (background noise).