The Art of the Call

By Tommy Booras

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Introduction

Oh, the life of the play-by-play announcer. What's a better job than to be paid to watch and broadcast a sporting event? The same event where thousands of fans have to pay to get into a stadium or arena to watch; the play-by-play announcer is high above the action, usually in a small booth, with free food and drink available … and a roof overhead in case it rains or snows. You mean people get paid for doing this?

They sure do … but they're probably not being paid very much. If you ask most play-by-play announcers, they'll tell you they aren't in it for the money. – That's good, because at the high school or small college level, financial rewards are few. – In fact, for the hours required, the travel involved, the mental and physical hardships endured, the money-per-hour breakdown is usually less than the minimum wage. – So if it's money you're after, seek employment elsewhere.

Then why do it? – Why drive two to three ~~2 3~~ hours or more, in your own car, for a few bucks, a green hot dog, a watered-down drink, to sit on top of a rickety old press box in a small, sporadically-lit football stadium, a bandbox gymnasium, or a dirt patch with chalk lines, surrounded by fans who know more than you do, sound better than you ever could … and would trade places with you in a New York minute?

The love of the game.

The play-by-play announcer is more than just a voice describing the events of a game. The P-B-P person becomes the eyes and ears of fans in small towns, college campuses, and metropolitan areas who aren't witnessing the game in person.– In a lot of cases, the P-B-P announcer becomes as identifiable with the team as the team itself; almost an extension of that team.– The announcer "calls" a game to a select audience; an audience that's sometimes antagonized, usually forgives, and always involved.

The intimacy of the medium adds a different flavor to the broadcast.– Radio, by nature, is personal; one-on-one; a friendly voice heard through a speaker; a constant and portable companion, whether at the game itself, or in a car, or in a room.– Television, and the introduction of live video, changes the play-by-play announcer's role from eyewitness to host.– A televised event needs little audio accompaniment, because the viewer sees the same thing the play-by-play team sees, at exactly the same time.– Thanks to multiple camera locations, replay, and informational graphics, the home audience has a better view of the game than the broadcast crew, who watches the game on the field first, then looks at replays on a monitor in the booth.– This also turns viewers into play-by-play announcers at home. Who among us hasn't called a dramatic event from the comfort of an easy chair?

The love of the game.

This manual is partly a guide on how to approach and prepare for a play-by-play broadcast of a sporting event, primarily football, basketball, and baseball.– More focus will be spent on high school broadcasts, since many entry-level play-by-play positions are at the level of high school sports.– But this manual is also a tribute to the thousands of voices throughout the country; those friendly voices coming through your radio, re-creating the excitement of a nearby or far-away game; on those cold or rainy nights when someone had to run ~~500~~ five hundred feet of telephone line from a coach's office to a press box; or was forced to move into another booth ten minutes before game-time; or had to sit in the stands, surrounded by

the other team's fans who listen to every word and felt free to critique the broadcast; or was promised a numerical roster but still hadn't seen one by tip-off; or who had to work "on the fly" as far as the other team went because no one could find a lineup or even an old program.

For those who are, and for those who want to be.

You know who you are.

The love of the game.

~~Tommy Booras~~

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Both institutes included sessions on radio play-by-play, pre-game, and post-game techniques and ideas. Panelists included play-by-play announcers from all levels of sports ((listed by their current or last P-B-P assignment, followed by other jobs), and I'd like to acknowledge and thank them:

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Author's note: Time to get my two cents in.– My play-by-play background included two seasons (1990–1991) on cable television broadcasts of the Shreveport Captains Baseball Club (AA-Texas League) in Shreveport, Louisiana.– The cable TV games were also simulcast on the Captains' radio outlet in Shreveport, KEEL-AM.– I did color and play-by-play with veteran north Louisiana broadcaster "Freeway" Dave Nitz, who, along with Captains owner Taylor Moore and Moore Video Productions General Manager Gilbert Little, get a huge thanks for giving me an opportunity I never thought I'd get.– I also broadcast several high school baseball playoff games with Denton Ryan High School in 1995 while working at Sammons Cable in Denton, Texas.– My thanks to Tim Crouch at Sammons for that opportunity, too.~~ TB~~

Pre-~~g~~Game

Contrary to popular belief, a play-by-play announcer doesn't just show up ~~30~~thirty minutes before game time, grab a soda and a program, and wait for the game to start.– As in nearly every broadcasting job, there's more to it than meets the eye and ear.– What you see isn't all that's there.– The pre-game ritual has three basic components that most experienced P-B-P announcers agree on:

—**Prepare, prepare, prepare!**

There's no such thing as enough information, there can never be enough statistics, and you can never start early enough.– A good play-by-play person does lots of homework.– The gathering of insightful information on the players and coaches; the collection of meaningful statistics; and the ability to present them on the air, combine to make an average broadcast a successful one.– But the good P-B-P person doesn't feel the need or even the obligation to use every bit of information.– The trick is to use the information you have at the right moment.– Bringing up the extracurricular hobbies of a quarterback when his team is playing defense is not good use of information.– Timing is everything in play-by-play.– Information is essential, but using it at the right time is crucial.– A basic rule of thumb: two or three hours of prep time per one hour of broadcast.– So, a typical three-hour broadcast might require as much as nine hours of homework.

Where do you get information?– If it's a broadcast of professional team, media relations departments compile more stats than a broadcast crew could ever use.– These departments

also create extensive media guides.– Most of this information can be obtained through each team's web-site and statistics are updated almost immediately after a game. The fortunate few who broadcast on the professional sports level have no problem collecting whatever personal information and game statistics are needed.– In addition, each league compiles its own statistics, and since league stats are considered official, it's a good idea to regularly consult the league's numbers.

Major college programs also fall in this category.– Sports information departments are the lifeblood of the play-by-play announcer.– Knowing the sports information director (S-I-D) and the staff is an important element in keeping up with ever-changing information and statistics.– It is the S-I-D's job to make sure all media covering the game are updated and informed about players and statistics.– As with the pros, major colleges utilize the Internet for current information and immediate statistical updates.– The National Collegiate Athletic Association (N-C-A-A) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (N-A-I-A) also collect statistical information from each game, not to mention each individual conference's own numbers-gathering process.

But suppose you're broadcasting the local high school football games, and there are no media relations departments, no S-I-Ds, no media guides, no web-sites, no central location for gathering statistics.– Now what?

Now the play-by-play announcer turns into a reporter.

Gathering statistics at the high school level is usually spotty, often unofficial, and always difficult to find.– The intrepid P-B-P broadcaster will have to do some legwork in order to collect enough information to use during the game.– The first and most obvious place to start is with the coaches themselves.– A phone call to the head coach is the initial contact.– If it's possible, offer to meet the coach at his office before practice.– The head coach of the team you're broadcasting should give you as much information as you'll need, whether it's game

stats, or personal information on the key players.– But the play-by-play person will have to ask specific questions to get such information ("What about the halfback is unusual?~~.~~ ~~d~~ Does he have any hobbies?– Is he a straight~~-~~ A student?– Does he volunteer his time somewhere?")– Don't be afraid to ask the head coach these types of questions.– Personal insight into the players can add a very personal and human element to a broadcast and gives the listeners a glimpse of these Friday night warriors they can't get anywhere else… except from you.

Of course, you expect complete cooperation from the coaching staff of the team you're broadcasting, but what about the other team?– It's not unusual to run into a situation where the opposing team views you, the play-by-play announcer from the other team, as "the enemy."– Coaches at every level are sometimes suspicious of outsiders, i.e.~~:~~, people not associated with their program.– This also includes the broadcasters.– Scenario: ~~t~~The head coach of ABC High School is afraid he'll tell the P-B-P person from DEF High School something about ABC's offense and the P-B-P person will run straight into the coach's office at DEF High School and tell the coaches all about ABC's offense.– Don't be totally surprised if you run into something similar to the "spy" theory.– As the play-by-play announcer, you indirectly represent the team you're broadcasting and, intentionally or not, players, coaches, and fans from the other side will see you as part of that team.– You'll have your work cut out for you if and when you run into this type of dilemma.– You'll need to assure the opposing coaches that you're not a spy, but a broadcaster, and all you're trying to do is get information on the other team so you can present a well-balanced and entertaining broadcast.– You'll have to remind the opposing coaches that you work for the radio station airing the game, not the high school, and that you have no stake in the outcome of the game.

And that still might not be enough.

If you run into a wall from the opposing coaches, your next step is to contact local media outlets, such as the newspaper or the opposing P-B-P announcer, to get information from them.– Small town newspapers (daily, bi-weekly, or weekly) always have someone covering the local high school sports scene.– Find out who he or she is, make the contact, and hopefully, you'll get what you need.– Obviously, the ~~i~~Internet is a tremendous source for potential information, even with high school sports, so be sure to check school or local media websites.– If the opposing high school has its own radio broadcast, it's always a good idea to introduce yourself to the play-by-play announcer.– Perhaps the two of you could swap information on the teams, the best place to park and set up at the stadium, a decent place to eat in town before and/or after the game, etc.– It never hurts to network with other media members.– Be sure to return the courtesy, too.

By the way, if you're wondering when to start making these phone calls, the earlier the better.– The Monday morning before a Friday night game is when the information gathering process should start.– It might take a couple of days to get through to a head coach.– Don't expect a callback, either.– Coaches rarely have the time or make the time to call a media member of an opposing team, so expect to make a lot of phone calls to the head coach's office.– Be persistent.– You might consider talking to other coaches on the staff, too.– The offensive and defensive coordinators on a football team can give valuable insight into strategies and tendencies.– They also get to know their players more closely than a head coach, so the coordinators, if they're willing, can provide personal information on a player the head coach might not know ("Watch our inside linebacker, number 55.– He lives on a farm and wrestles bulls, so he's pretty strong and mean, too.").– Remember: ~~t~~The head coach of any team isn't always the best source of information about that team.– Coordinators and position coaches have as much knowledge, and sometimes more knowledge, than the head coach.– The head coach also has other obligations (speaking engagements, personal

appearances, media interviews) that the rest of the staff does not.– The time element is always a factor with the head coach and the availability of the head coach to outside influences will also be a problem.

Bottom line: ~~t~~The earlier you begin your pre-game informational gathering process, the better.– You might need every minute you can devote to it.

But all the information and statistics in the world don't mean a thing unless you can access it during a broadcast.– The majority of play-by-play broadcasters use what is called a spotter board.– Examples of spotter boards are located at the end of the manual.– The spotter board contains names, positions, numbers, and whatever statistical facts are available for each player.– In some cases, such as offensive linemen, there won't be any statistics.– In these instances, height and weight are all that's available.– For position players (quarterbacks, running backs, receivers), height, weight, yardage gained, yardage per carry or catch, and touchdowns, are all traditional statistics football fans would want to know. Defensive players, such as defensive backs and linebackers, might only have takeaway statistics available (fumbles recovered, interceptions).– Stats for basketball players would include field goal and free throw percentages, points per game, rebounds per game, and assists per game.– Baseball statistics are plentiful; batting average, home runs, runs batted in (RBI), fielding percentage, stolen bases, etc.– To know baseball is to understand that it is a game driven by statistics.

Side note: ~~i~~If you don't know how to keep a scorebook, learn quickly.– A well-kept baseball scorebook can tell the entire game story with little or no embellishment from the broadcaster.– Football drive charts and quarter-by-quarter (or half-by-half) scorebooks in basketball will give any play-by-play announcer a complete record of the game.

Let's fast-forward to game day.– Once you've collected and gathered every bit of information you can possibly get your hands on, organized your information onto a spotter

board (which will be discussed later) or whatever you use as a reference point, it's time to head to the game site.– How early should you arrive?– You should be there as early as is feasible, but most veteran play-by-play announcers will tell you they arrive **NO LATER THAN TWO HOURS BEFORE GAME TIME.**– The truth is that you can't get to a sporting event early enough.– You'll need to get your bearings at the game site (where to park, where to set up, is there food in the press box or will I have to eat before the game, etc.), and fighting game-time crowds and traffic is too late to solve these problems.– You'll basically know how long it takes you to set up your equipment, test it, and organize your boards and other information in the booth, after the first game.– If it is the first game, allow for extra setup time.– Give yourself as much time as you know you'll need, and build in extra time to allow for problem solving and trouble-shooting.– Always assume Murphy's Law (anything that can go wrong will go wrong) is in effect.– Never lose sight of the fact that game time means game time, whether you're ready to go on the air or not.

Don't forget to get a game program, even if you have to buy it yourself. Some programs have lots of local information that you might be able to use in your broadcast.

Check players' names and their proper pronunciations.– No one likes to hear a name mispronounced on the air.– It makes the broadcaster seem unprepared.– Check with someone in the press box if you see a name that looks like it could be a tongue twister.
If you're unsure you'll pronounce the name correctly, write it the way it sounds.– You don't lose points for misspelling or phonetically writing a name.

Once you're set up and ready for the game to start, take time to watch the teams in warm-ups. -This is a great time to re-check numerical rosters, which you should have, and make sure names and numbers match.– It's also a good time, especially in football, to notice offensive formations.– Most football teams warm up by running their most basic plays, and since you've probably never seen the opposing team before, you might take the time to

familiarize yourself with that team's standard offensive scheme.– You can even take this time to visualize some of your broadcast, such as calling the play to yourself during warm-ups.

There's a lot to do before the game.- In fact, broadcasting the game itself is often the least complicated part of the entire process. -But a successful broadcast can never take place unless the play-by-play announcer and the broadcast crew spend the time and effort to collect information and statistics long before kickoff, tip-off, or the first pitch.

Play-by-Play

The equipment works, your booth is set up the way you want it, you're fed, you've got your game face on, and you're ready to call the game of your life. Certainly there must be more to it than that, right? All that's left is to say into a microphone what you see unfolding in front of you … isn't it?

It is … and it isn't.

Broadcasting a game is more complex than it seems. The reason so many radio listeners and TV viewers probably think it's so easy to do is because they're doing the same thing the announcer is doing. Watching a game on TV gives the viewer a visual image that's just as good, and usually better, than the broadcast team gets in the press box. There's nothing more relaxing than "calling a game" from the comforts of home.

But the broadcast team is not in someone's living room. It is usually crammed into a small booth, or stuck in the corner of a press box, within earshot of everyone else in that booth. The broadcast team has one goal: to tell the story of the game. That, basically, is the essence of what a play-by-play announcer, a color analyst, and a sideline reporter do.

See it, and say it.

The function of the play-by-play broadcaster is to watch the action and describe what happens. Nothing else really matters. The good P-B-P person never loses sight of the fact that he or she is the eyes and ears of an audience that, if it's a radio broadcast, has no visual perspective of the game.

A radio play-by-play announcer can help the audience by **"painting a mental picture"** of what's going on in the stadium or arena. Describing the stadium itself is one way to take the

listeners to the game, especially if the setting is unusual. For example, if there are hedges behind the end zone, or if the field house crams folding chairs behind the goal, or if fans at a baseball field set up barbecue pits and tables behind the outfield fence, the announcer should tell the audience. These simple techniques can make the listening audience feel as if it's sitting in the bleachers, thus adding to the intimacy and heightening the feeling of the broadcast.

The play-by-play broadcaster can also describe weather conditions. You need not be a certified meteorologist to simply look around and say what you see ("It's a beautiful, sunny day … dark clouds off to the west, so we might see rain sometime during the game … the flags on top of the stands are swirling; that could be a problem for the kicking game"), so be observant.

You could also describe each team's uniforms ("DEF High is wearing its home white jerseys with large red numbers, red pants with double stripes down each pant leg, and a white helmet with a tiger head logo."). Talk about a fan section that might be worth mentioning ("The student section is directly behind the visitor's bench, and the students are all wearing white shirts and they'll stand throughout the entire game."); the band; the field; the list could go on and on. The point is that the radio play-by-play announcer can do a lot to **personalize a broadcast** to the listeners by telling the audience anything and everything that's going on.

Now, the game.

See it and say it is a bit simplistic. Let the play happen first, and then describe it. **Don't get in the habit of calling a play before it happens**. Radio play-by-play announcers have an advantage in that the radio audience can't see the play. But anticipating a play is not going to help the listener. It's only going to confuse the audience and make you sound as if you don't know what's going on. There's no need to rush the call. On the other hand, you don't want to lag behind the play, especially if there's a loud crowd reaction. Keep up with the action as it unfolds.

A good way to keep up is to use generic terms for player positions.– A split end can be called a receiver.– The weak side linebacker is a linebacker.– A halfback is a running back.– The two guards, the power forward—they're still guards and forwards.– Play-by-play announcers can get into trouble if they get too technical with their descriptions.– Your audience is not full of former coaches and Hall of Fame inductees.– They're parents of players, hard-core fans, fringe fans, casual fans, people who know a lot about the local team, and people who know absolutely nothing about sports but just want to know if the local team is winning or not.– It's a mix.– Keep all of them involved by keeping it basic and simple.

It all goes to the notion of knowing your audience.– At the high school level, you'll get a wide spectrum of fans, many of who are just listening to get a score or to hear if a certain player gets in the game.– High school football at most levels is not as complex as the college game, and certainly not at the level of professional football.– A good play-by-play announcer understands that, and keeps the broadcast at the same level.– Who's listening to most high school broadcasts? Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, girlfriends, neighbors, and alumni make up a large percentage of the listening audience.– That's not to infer these fans aren't deeply devoted to their team—they certainly are—but the game itself is played at a different level than major colleges or professionals.– The broadcast should reflect it.

—Score! -Down and Dd-istance! -Time!

Successful play-by-play announcers also have a strong command of the English language. You can't say it if you can't describe it.– Expressing oneself clearly is an art form.– Learning new words or better ways to say something, re-reading that old English book, and understanding the power of the spoken word are methods that can keep the play-by-play broadcaster's game fresh and interesting.– It's also a good way of avoiding one of the classic pitfalls of the play-by-play call: using the same expression over and over and over.– Most announcers aren't aware of it until someone points it out to them or they catch it when they listen to a broadcast.– But a

working knowledge of English and the proper use of the language can keep an announcer from getting into "word rut."

Play-by-play broadcasters must know the rules of the game. If it takes buying a rulebook and studying it, then buy a rulebook and study it. Events happen on the field that needs explanation, especially if there is a penalty or foul or argument between coach and official. Announcers must be able to tell the listening audience what and why a penalty or foul was called. Announcers who don't understand the rules of the game lose credibility with the audience. How can you be trusted to broadcast a game if you don't know how the game is played? Study the rulebook, ask coaches or officials if you don't understand, and be able to describe a rules infraction to the audience. Rules change, too, so you should keep in touch with local officials' associations. Last year's five-yard penalty could be this year's ten-yard penalty or no penalty at all.

Score! Down and Distance! Time!

Names of players, not their uniform numbers, should make up your broadcast. There's no need to get hung up with numbers of players; a radio audience can't see the game so player numbers don't matter to them, and a TV audience can see the game so player numbers don't need to be mentioned. Instead of describing a player by number and name, just use a name ("Pass caught by Smith at the 40-yard-line … Johnson shoots from the corner—it's good…. Ground ball to short—Jones gets it, throws to first, for the second out of the inning."). Adding numbers adds unnecessary clutter to a broadcast, and for the play-by-play announcer, it's a potential distraction that could easily disrupt the flow of the call. If an announcer spends two or three seconds looking at a numerical roster, trying to find who number 82 is, then spends an extra second saying "number 82," then the play is probably over and the call has been missed.

Concentrate on who is doing what, not what number the player is wearing.

Play-by-play announcers sometimes "blank out" during a game. They might forget, for a moment, the name of a player. If this happens, go back to the basic rule of calling a game: **see it**

and say it.– Describe the play first, then check your spotter board for a name ("The pass is caught at the 35 … shoved out of bounds at the 32 [look for the name now] … Smith reached up and took the ball away from the defensive back.").

Enthusiasm is a critical aspect of any broadcast.– There's nothing wrong with a play-by-play announcer showing excitement.– It would be unnatural for anyone to broadcast a dramatic play without showing some emotion.– Listeners and viewers expect the play-by-play broadcaster to get excited if someone makes a great catch or sinks a half-court shot to end a game.– But there is such a thing as showing too much excitement … becoming too passionate … or getting too emotional.– Uncontrolled emotion on a broadcast can get to a point where objectivity is sacrificed and the game call is lost in the shuffle.– A good play-by-play announcer controls his or her excitement and enthusiasm.– A broadcaster can get excited without getting emotional.– After all, the play-by-play crew is doing something most people would give anything to do— broadcast a game and get paid for doing it!– What fan wouldn't want to do the same thing?– A broadcast should sound as exciting and dramatic as the game is.– But turning a broadcast into an out-of-control cheering section is unprofessional and a disservice to the audience.

Pace yourself.– The first play of the game shouldn't sound like the game-winner.– Save the dramatic calls for the dramatic moments.

— Score!– Down and ~~d~~Distance!– Time!

Injuries are a part of every sporting event.– Serious injuries can delay a game for ~~10~~ten minutes or more.– But playing doctor from the press box can be a dangerous and incorrect situation for the play-by-play announcer.– There is an obligation to tell the listeners what's happening on the field if an injury has caused a stoppage of the game.– But speculation as to the severity of an injury can unnecessarily worry an audience (especially at the high school level, where the player's parents and relatives could be listening) and damage the broadcaster's credibility.– A player lying on a field holding his knee could have cramps, a sprained knee, or

serious ligament damage.~~—~~ A broadcaster sitting in a press box cannot diagnose the injury, and should not attempt to do so.~~–~~ Leave the diagnoses to the medical professionals on the field.~~–~~ If you have a sideline reporter, his or her job should be to talk to the team trainer and get whatever information is available regarding the injury.~~–~~ Otherwise, the play-by-play crew should stay away from playing doctor on the air.

If it's an unusually long injury delay, the broadcast crew is going to have to keep the chatter going.~~–~~ You can't just stop talking for ~~15~~ fifteen minutes while medical personnel attend to the injured player.~~–~~ You don't want to speculate on the injury, either.~~–~~ Then what does the broadcast team talk about?~~–~~ This is where your pre-game preparation kicks in.~~–~~ Hopefully, there's enough information and statistics available that the play-by-play announcer and the color analyst can talk about the two teams in generic terms.~~–~~ They could talk about different aspects of the game up to the point of the injury delay ("ABC High had a good drive going… Tigers have had the ball for five minutes in the third quarter… Smith has had a great game so far, with ~~60~~sixty yards on ~~11~~eleven carries… great defensive stand by DEF late in the first half to keep ABC from scoring.").~~–~~ No doubt the broadcast crew will have to be great ad-libbers or "tap dancers" (able to kill time) in situations such as long injury delays, or weather delays, or power outages, or whatever might cause an extended stoppage of play.

Criticism of officials is also a sticky situation for a broadcaster.~~–~~ Television replays make some mention of a clearly missed call inevitable and unavoidable, especially in the professional and major college game.~~–~~ Second-guessing of officials' calls is second nature in today's sports culture.~~–~~ But what about the high school game?~~–~~ A radio play-by-play announcer at a high school game is not likely to have the luxury of television replay, or any live TV feed, available for review when a controversial official's call occurs.~~–~~ As with speculating about an injury, the play-by-play broadcaster is best served by not openly questioning the ability, sanity, or team loyalty of an official.~~–~~ It would be very difficult for the play-by-play person to have a better view

of a play than the official on the field.– It would be fair to say that an official's call is causing unrest among fans and coaches if reaction to that call is causing unrest among fans and coaches. But speculating as to why an official might make a call is unwarranted, unnecessary, and most importantly, unprofessional.

In the same vein, criticism of players, especially high school athletes, is self-defeating to a true play-by-play announcer.– It serves no purpose for a broadcaster to openly criticize an amateur athlete, who truly plays for the love of the game with the same passion the play-by-play broadcaster calls the game.– Highly paid professional athletes understand that criticism is part of their game.– Amateur athletes do not warrant it and should not be subject to it.

—Score!– Down and distance!– Time!

There have been many references to score, down and distance, and time, during this portion of the play-by-play chapter.– There is nothing more important to any broadcast than the game score, down and distance (football) or game situation in other sports, and time.– Most play-by-play announcers agree that the score, down and distance, and time, can't be repeated enough times during a broadcast.– The listening audience is tuning in and out of a game at various stages, and since the radio audience can't look at the scoreboard, it relies on the play-by-play person to give that information.

Beginning play-by-play announcers would do well if they focused on those three elements of a broadcast—score, down and distance, and time—and worked play calling in between.– Some broadcasters use various tricks to remind themselves to mention the score or the game situation or the time left on the clock—an egg timer set every three minutes, an hourglass, taping a note on the glass in the press box—whatever will remind the play-by-play announcer to glance at the scoreboard every so often and tell the audience what's going on at the game ("ABC has the ball at its own 20 and still leads DEF, 10–3, with 4:35 left in the third quarter.").– It's not necessary to mention these things after every play or pitch, although in basketball, where there are many

score changes, updating the score and game time are important elements.– In football and baseball, there's no such thing as giving the score too often, or mentioning time left in the quarter too many times, saying who has the ball and where the ball is on the field or who's on base and who's at the plate.

One final note about broadcasting a game—enjoy it!– This is particularly difficult when the game turns into a blowout, but look at a blowout as a real opportunity to work on your skills. Let the audience know through your enthusiasm that you're glad to be there as an eyewitness to a sporting event and that you're fortunate to be able to broadcast it.– The audience is interested in the game, not how it took you an hour to find a decent place to eat or that you had to walk eight flights of stairs to get to the press box, only to find out there was no booth for you and the only phone line was in the field house, which is ~~50~~five hundred~~0~~ feet from the stadium and you had to pull a phone line through a parking lot and a mud hole and you got everything working two minutes before game time and there's no air conditioning in the press box.– The game is the thing!

The Color Analyst

The role of the play-by-play announcer is basic: call the game as it happens. The role of the color analyst is different. In many cases, a color analyst is a former player or coach. This situation can be a problem because the knowledge of former players or coaches is at a much higher level than that of fans or broadcasters. Some analysts can easily talk "over the heads" of the audience with their intricate explanations of X's and O's or the box-and-one defense or the real difference between a split-fingered fastball and a slider. Overindulgence in the details of a sport can leave the audience, not to mention the play-by-play broadcaster, confused.

To avoid this, the play-by-play broadcaster and the color analyst should sit down before a broadcast begins and define their roles. Most play-by-play announcers want to call the game and just the game; the color analyst is usually better suited to explain why a play happened. In other words, **the P-B-P broadcaster tells what happened, and the color analyst tells why it happened.**

In a football game, a general rule of thumb is the play-by-play announcer begins the call as soon as the offense breaks its huddle. This allows the announcer to explain formations, substitutions, ball position on the field, and defensive alignments. Once the play is over and the whistle blows, the color analyst should look for an opportunity to explain, in more detail, why the play was successful or unsuccessful. The color analyst's on-air time can be best defined as that time between the end of a play and the offensive huddle break of the next play. To make this easier, the color person should be looking at elements away from the ball, such as defensive positioning, which's covering whom in the secondary, line play, and the like. The play-by-play announcer should be focused on the ball, and the color analyst should be observing other aspects

of the game.– A play-by-play broadcaster does not want the color analyst to repeat the call; the idea is to add other elements of the game to the broadcast.

Baseball games, by their nature, have much more dead time than other sports.– There's time between pitches, time between at-bats, time between pitching changes, time between innings… and no real time restraints.– A pitcher is supposed to throw every ~~20~~ twenty seconds or so, but this rule is rarely enforced.– Unlike football and basketball, there is no game clock in baseball. A game can last ~~90~~ninety minutes or four hours.– A baseball broadcast is the ultimate challenge to the play-by-play announcer and the color analyst.– They can't just stop talking for ~~30~~thirty seconds between pitches; the yak has to continue.– A color analyst's role in a baseball game is especially important to keeping the chatter going and the rhythm of the broadcast flowing.– An analyst's insights into such matters as infield and outfield positioning, the pitch count on a pitcher, the effects of the wind and the sun, the length of the lead by the runner at first base– all these details can make a broadcast stimulating to the listener.

Basketball broadcasts are often handled by one person.– The natural up-and-down flow of a basketball game doesn't allow for a lot of color analysis.– But natural game stoppages, such as during free throws, are good spots for analysts to describe a particularly good scheme or play. Again, the analyst's role is to add something to the broadcast that the play-by-play announcer does not mention.

The ideal ~~makeup~~ composition of a broadcast team is ~~when~~ the play-by-play announcer describ~~es~~ing the action and the color analyst giv~~es~~ing details related to the action.– In a perfect world, the chemistry between the two announcers would sound like a running conversation.– The P-B-P person and the color analyst would hopefully develop a rapport if not a friendship.– A strained relationship between the two announcers is hard to hide on the air.– The audience will definitely notice it, too.– A good play-by-play and color team compliment and complement each other.

The Sideline Reporter

Many professional, major college, and even high school broadcasts use a third person on a broadcast, commonly referred to as a sideline reporter. Unlike the play-by-play announcer and the color analyst, the sideline reporter has a different perspective and a different role. Obviously, the sideline reporter is on the field during the game. The sideline reporter's role is more clearly defined; act as a reporter in injury situations and get information during a game that is unavailable to the broadcast crew in the booth.

A good sideline reporter has done pre-game preparation regarding statistics and other vital information about players. The reporter should always position himself or herself as close to a play as possible. Because the game action is literally happening in front of the reporter, he or she has an angle and perspective unmatched by anyone in a press box. The reporter's commentary should reflect this perspective. A sharp sideline reporter might notice a player is lining up offside, or that a player is tiring, or that one particular area of the field isn't as well lit as other areas and that could cause problems for receivers.

In the case of an injury, the sideline reporter should talk to the team trainer or doctor. This type of information, as mentioned in the play-by-play chapter, should not be subject to speculation or guessing. A good sideline reporter will have developed some sort of relationship with the team trainers and doctors, and should explain to the medical staff that his or her only role is to pass along correct information about an injury. Whether the trainers and doctors decide to make such information public is at their discretion.

Perhaps the most important element a sideline reporter can bring to a broadcast is the ability to listen in on coaches and players during the game and during timeouts.– This is something a reporter should clear with the coaching staff before a game.– Coaches will not appreciate a nosy reporter sticking his or her head into a "chalk talk session" on the bench unless they know who the reporter is and why the reporter is eavesdropping on a strategy conference.– Once this hurdle is cleared, however, a sideline reporter can add valuable insight and up-to-date information on what a team plans to do with that seven-man blitz or how to stop the speedy halfback, or an injury update.

A successful broadcast allows each member of the crew to perform at peak levels; the play-by-play announcer describes the play, the color analyst tells why it did or did not work, and the sideline reporter adds that the second-team quarterback has been warming up along the bench and will see game action on the next series.

"I know what the guys upstairs can and can't see, and I try to fill in those holes," says Nashville-based radio host Kevin Ingram.– He has worked in the market since 1999 and currently works as the play-by-play broadcaster for Belmont University basketball, and he has been the sideline reporter for Vanderbilt University's football radio broadcasts since 2002.– Ingram recognizes the importance and value of getting an on-field perspective of a broadcast.

"If used properly, the sideline reporter can add a lot to a football broadcast, especially on radio," Ingram says.– "You really have to be on your toes and willing to keep moving throughout the broadcast.– It helps, of course, to have a working knowledge of the game and the team.– It's most helpful to know the people you work with.– There are a bunch of folks down there on the sidelines, get to know as many as you can, like coaches, trainers, managers, etc.– You never know who might have some good information."

Ingram prepares for a game broadcast from a sideline reporter's perspective in the same manner as he prepares for a play-by-play broadcast.

"The week of the game, I typically go to the head coach's press conference on Monday.– It's an easy way to talk to the coach and usually a handful of key players.– I attend practice as time permits.– That can get tedious and tough, but ~~(~~[it's~~)~~] usually worth going.– I interview the ~~(~~[offensive and defensive~~)~~] coordinators on Thursday morning for our pre-game show.

"On game day, I usually arrive at least two hours before kickoff, which is an hour before we go on the air.– The way our pre-game show is structured, we have a lot of it already done, with a few live segments to do.– The broadcast crew meets to go over last-minute items, like pronunciations, segments during the broadcast, injuries, etc.– I check with the sports information director and the ~~(~~[opponent's~~)~~] radio crew for injuries.

"I go down to the field ~~10~~ten to ~~15~~fifteen minutes before the pre-game show goes on. I check out the microphone and receiver equipment.– I also check out the locker room setup if need be during one of the recorded segments during the second half– hour of the pre-game show.– I will say hello to a couple of the coaches sometimes.– They're usually locked into the game at that point.– I also know a couple of the SEC [~~(~~Southeastern Conference~~)~~] officials, so I will say 'hi' if I see them."

Ingram has obvious during-the-game responsibilities, but he admits his favorite part of his sideline reporter duty takes place before the game ever starts.

"Covering the coin toss ~~(~~[is~~)~~] actually one of my favorite parts.– I walk out there with the officials, and usually take a minute to check out the stadium scene from midfield.– It's awesome to look around in one of the giant SEC venues, and see 90,000 or 100,000 people in the stands.– I try to get a good spot where I can get my microphone into the huddle, without hitting the referee's arm when he throws the coin!– It's cool to look at the players' faces when they're all ready to rip someone's head off," Ingram says.

Comment [ART1]: AU: I assume these words were not parenthetically said by the speaker but added by you. I've also bracketed words added for amplification/clarification of the speaker's statements throughout. Ok?

Once the game begins, Ingram says he tries to get as close to the line of scrimmage as he can, and watches the game as it unfolds. He admits one of the challenges of being on the field is avoiding the game getting too close.

"Be ready to bail out if the play comes your way," Ingram warns. "I was nearly run over at Georgia once, and I saw my whole life flash before my eyes!"

One would think communication between the sideline reporter and the broadcast crew in the press box would be a monumental problem. That's why the sideline reporter, in conjunction with the broadcasters and producers upstairs, have to have a good working relationship and a solid understanding ~~what~~of each other's ~~s are~~ roles.

"We ~~(~~[Vanderbilt/ISP Radio Network~~)~~] do our broadcasts a little differently than some," Ingram says. "The guys upstairs know I'm paying attention to the game and that I'm close to the play. They'll just ask me whenever they need a different perspective, rather than always waiting for me to say I have something. The producers and the announcers can hear me even if I'm not on the air. I often help with spotting, or relaying something that might be happening on the field."

As the game progresses, Ingram moves around the field and tries to listen in on sideline conversations between coaches and players when possible.

"I really think it's more helpful to be on top of the play and provide an extra set of eyes on the field, rather than just giving injury reports or introducing feature stories," Ingram says.

Regarding injury reports, Ingram says despite his strong relationship with Vanderbilt's head athletic trainer, he is not always able to give complete injury details on the air because of legal issues regarding the release of medical information to the public.

As for the occasionally controversial and often-ridiculed halftime interview with the head coach, Ingram acknowledges the necessity of it, and watches for the right (or wrong) moment.

"He knows to look for me, and I usually keep it to two questions and out. I'm careful about approaching him if he's chewing out an official on the way to the tunnel. I just get the heck out of the way and wait until he's done. ([You)] also have to coordinate with the TV folks [(during a televised game)] if they have a sideline person wanting to do a halftime interview," Ingram says.

The sideline reporter has a unique angle and perspective of the game and of the broadcast. That also involves acting as a journalist on occasion. What about homerism, or overhearing something that could be construed as anti-Vanderbilt, or broadcasting something that could be misinterpreted or considered controversial?

"In terms of ethics, I like to think I have a pretty good feel for what should and should not be reported," Ingram says. "Even though we're broadcasting on Vanderbilt's network, we still try to be fair and give an accurate account of what's going on. If there's something in question, we'll talk it over and make a quick decision on whether to air it. There are times you're asked not to air certain sensitive information. That's part of being a reporter, and you want to maintain relationships and trust."

Post-~~g~~Game

In this definition, post-game means after the broadcast crew has signed off.~~–~~ Once the game is over and the announce team has thrown it back to the station, it's time for some perspective. There probably isn't a broadcaster around who hasn't been guilty of second-guessing himself or herself after a broadcast.~~–~~ Did I sound all right?~~–~~ Did I say anything wrong?~~–~~ How did I handle that controversial play on the air?~~–~~ Were my segues okay?~~–~~ Did I get all my breaks in?~~–~~ Was the audio all right?~~–~~ What about crowd noise~~—~~did the crowd microphone pick up good crowd sound?

The truth is that the "perfect broadcast" is a rare animal.~~–~~ A live, three-hour broadcast at any level is bound to have imperfections~~—~~some within the control of the broadcast crew, and some that the crew has no control over.~~–~~ Second-guessing is second nature to all broadcasters.~~–~~ Expect it, but don't let it consume you.

Most veteran play-by-play announcers record their games, either at the station or at home, and ~~will~~ listen to the broadcast themselves.~~–~~ It'~~s might be a better~~ a good idea to listen to ~~a~~the broadcast several days after the live broadcast.~~–~~ This ~~will~~ give~~s~~ the announcer a few days of

separation from the broadcast.– Listening to the game tape in a similar environment as the audience is also a good idea.– Remember:- Mmost people don't sit in a room and listen to a game for the entire length of that game, and neither should a broadcaster.– Listen to the game broadcast in the car while running errands, or spot-listen to the game (listen to one portion of the game, fast-forward the tape a few minutes, listen to another portion, etc.).– Pay attention to what is said and how it is said.– Many announcers fall into "word rut" as described earlier in the manual. The problem with a live broadcast is the broadcasters are often unaware they're using the same words or phrases over and over.– A post-game review session is the perfect place to find out.

Listening to other broadcasters could also give perspective and insight into one's own broadcast.– This is not to say one broadcaster should copy another; truthfully, most broadcasters pattern themselves after someone they've heard, consciously or unconsciously.- But listening to how other broadcasters call a game, their speech patterns or levels of excitement, can prove enlightening.

A good broadcaster should also let others listen to his or her tapes.– They don't have to be other broadcasters, either.– Broadcasters tend to listen to and for specific elements during a broadcast, but a fan's perspective can also be informative.– The more opinions one is able to get, the better the chance for improvement.

Notes and Quotes

There is no limit as to the number of play-by-play persons who could be consulted for this type of manual. The following broadcasters graciously offered their time, advice, and opinions on what the art of the call is for them, and what the profession means to them.

The National Scene: Tim Brando

Tim Brando is at the top of his profession. Brando has worked at the network sports level on a full-time basis since 1985, first with ESPN, then TNT, and now with CBS, where he works as a studio host for college football broadcasts and handles various football and basketball play-by-play duties. Brando also hosts a sports talk call-in show on the CBS Sports Radio Network. Clearly, Brando is a national broadcaster in the truest sense. But, like so many others in the profession, Brando's roots are local … very local.

“I broadcast my first football game for Neville High School in Monroe, Louisiana, when I was ~~14~~fourteen years old,” Brando remembers.~~–~~ “My father, Hub Brando, who was a pioneer in Shreveport television as a producer, writer, and entertainer, was out of the business in 1971 when a friend of his who owned a radio station in Monroe asked him if he’d do the games.~~–~~ He said he would, but he had an agenda ~~–~~ t~~—~~to get me on the air as a color analyst.~~–~~ My first game was Neville versus Captain Shreve in Shreveport, so I didn’t have to travel for that one.

“I’d never been on the air at that point, but I’d done play-by-play all my life~~–~~~~—~~in my room, with a cassette recorder, watching games on TV and calling them to myself.~~–~~ So seeing a game in person was easy for me.~~–~~ Seeing my dad doing it all those years helped me a lot, too,” Brando said.~~–~~ “But the first game must have gone pretty well, because the station owner decided he’d pay me to do the games.~~–~~ Twenty-five bucks a game.~~–~~ That’s pretty good money for a ~~14~~fourteen~~-~~ year~~-~~ old!”

Brando did Neville High School football games with his father for two years (1971 and 1972), riding the bus from Shreveport to Monroe (a 100-mile trip) on Friday afternoons and riding back to Shreveport with his father, who owned a hotel in Monroe.~~–~~ In 1973, Hub Brando bought a hotel in Longview, Texas, and Tim’s attention shifted westward.

“The guy who owned KLUE radio in Longview knew my dad, and he was looking for someone to do play-by-play for Pine Tree High School, which had just opened.~~–~~ I did that for two years the same way I did Neville High football~~–~~~~—~~I rode the bus from Shreveport to Longview [~~(~~about 60 miles~~)~~].~~–~~ By the time I graduated from high school, I had four years of football play-by-play experience,” Brando said.~~–~~ He had also begun working as a live booth announcer at the NBC affiliate in Shreveport, KTAL-TV, during his senior year of high school.

While attending Northeast Louisiana University (now known as The University of Louisiana at Monroe) on a debate scholarship, Brando began working as a radio announcer (“a good old-

fashioned rock jock") at Shreveport's KROK-FM, where he believes he got tremendous training in preparing him for sports play-by-play work.

"Working in radio was great, because it's all ad-lib, just like calling a game.– You're also talking over music, and trying to do it with some energy.– It's the same thing with broadcasting a game.– You're talking over a crowd, and trying to do it with energy, trying to build excitement and get your voice above the noise.

"The really good play-by-play people use their voices at the right level.– There's a very narrow line between controlled enthusiasm and outright yelling," Brando said.– "Sometimes you have to create your own energy.– A game can drag on for what seems like hours on end, so the play-by-play person has to be able to create some enthusiasm, just like radio announcers try to create excitement while talking up a song."

After graduating from college, Brando accepted a radio position at WIBR-AM in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, only because the management allowed him to a sports talk show in addition to his four hours on the air as a DJ.– Brando also did a high school game of the week, winning a Louisiana Associated Press (AP) Broadcasters Award for Best Play-By-Play in 1981, beating out more established college broadcasts in the state.– But fate, in the form of basketball, would change Brando's world later that year.

"LSU didn't have a regular play-by-play broadcaster for basketball in 1980. -Dale Brown ~~(~~[the head basketball coach]~~)~~ wanted me to do the games.– But I didn't have a basketball tape because I had never done basketball.– So I went to an NCAA tournament game in Houston, where LSU was playing, sat down on press row away from everyone else, pulled out a cassette recorder, and broadcast about five minutes of the second half of the LSU––Louisville game.– I wrote a letter to Bob Brodhead ~~(~~[LSU's athletic director~~)~~], explaining who I was and what I wanted to do, and included the tape of that basketball game.

"Fast forward to 1982.– I'd accepted a position at WGSO radio in New Orleans.– I met Brodhead at a news conference.– He knew who I was, said he'd read my letter and heard my tape, and wanted to know if I was interested in doing television work for LSU's pay-per-view venture called TigerVision.– I said I preferred TV, so there I was, having just moved to New Orleans but commuting to Baton Rouge [(75 miles)] to do LSU basketball on pay-per-view television," Brando recalled.

But those TV tapes got Brando looks.– A newly formed television sports production company called Sports Productions Inc. was on the prowl for play-by-play talent.– Brando got a call and was soon doing football games that were picked up by other networks, including USA and a fledgling all-sports outfit, ESPN.– During this period, Brando left radio for a weekend sports anchor job at the CBS affiliate in Baton Rouge, WAFB-TV.– So he was calling network-level games during the week and anchoring weekend sportscasts in Baton Rouge, making for a very busy, but extremely rewarding, schedule.

That schedule turned opportunistic in January 1985, when ESPN wanted Brando to call a Duke–Virginia basketball game.– Although it coincided with LSU–Mississippi State, Brando was able to broadcast the ESPN game, work with color analyst Dick Vitale, and earn $350.– The Duke–Virginia experience on ESPN led to other college basketball assignments, as well as college baseball and USFL (United States Football League) games, thus heightening Brando's exposure to a national audience.– That led to ESPN's hiring Brando as its sideline reporter for college football broadcasts in 1986, which led to a spot as an anchor on Sports Center at the company's Bristol, Connecticut, headquarters, where "I couldn't say no to doing Sports Center, calling games, and making $125,000 a year," Brando said.

Brando also spent a couple of years at Turner Network Television (TNT) broadcasting college and professional sports, including TV games of the 1995 World Series champion Atlanta Braves.

Brando is now a part of the CBS sports family, where he utilizes his abilities as a studio host and a play-by-play broadcaster, two very different and difficult positions to master.

"I think that's part of my success," Brando said. "Most people in the business are either on-air talent of some sort ([studio host, sideline reporter)] or a play-by-play person. I'm able to do both, and I enjoy doing both. People who want to get in the broadcasting business have to bring a unique quality to the craft. Decision-makers are looking for something different, and I think I've been able to do that."

Brando believes part of his uniqueness is the ability to handle any situation and any sport. "I think I hold the record for broadcasting the most sports—twenty-six—26 not counting cheerleading contests, and the reason is because no one wanted to do martial arts or tennis or aquatics or roller hockey or whatever. I saw each event as another opportunity to fine-tune by ability to do play-by-play. I have more fun doing sports that are considered 'outside the box' because I don't want to be pigeon-holed into any particular sport.

"What I did when covering a sport I knew little or nothing about is, first and foremost, get someone who does know that sport, ask lots and lots of questions, understand the unique terminology that is tied to that sport, and be sure you respect that sport or you'll never make it in play-by-play."

Brando's focus in calling a game—any game—is basic. The roles of the play-by-play broadcaster and the color analyst are also clearly defined.

"While calling the game I'm focused on the field, not the monitor. The moment the ball is no longer in play, I immediately go to the monitor where I look at replays or graphics. Television rules when there is a dead ball situation. Only then should the play-by-play person tell a story or support a theme.

"As the play-by-play voice, I am the 'when, where, and what.' The color analyst is the 'why'—why a play did or did not happen. The color analyst shouldn't say anything I haven't

said already and whatever the analyst says has to be said quickly.– The play-by-play person is the set-up and the analyst is the spiker."

"Football is a great TV sport because there is a lot of time between plays so the broadcaster and analyst have a lot of time to tell stories.– Basketball has a lot of action and definite stoppages, and it's usually a two-hour event, so it's a classic sports short-story format."

As a veteran of both radio and television sports play-by-play, Brando sees an obvious difference between the two mediums.

"Radio is narrative, and TV is dialogue.– I see radio play-by-play as the Picasso; you're painting a picture to the audience.– Television play-by-play is a supporting player.– On a TV broadcast I'll be judged on how well I help my color analyst.– Radio is a personal medium because people take it more personally.– A radio audience is usually pretty attentive; it has to be since there is nothing to look at.– TV is just background music in most households.– A radio voice sounds like it's talking directly to someone.– That's hard to do on television."

Brando prepares for each broadcast by making a spotter board full of information that he can quickly find during a game.– He uses a color coding system that utilizes the team's colors of the game he's calling.– He also uses different colors for different pieces of information.– Brando spends time talking to coaches and players before a game, looking for tidbits or any unusual pieces of information that could add to a broadcast, although he warns that there is such a thing as getting too much information.

"You can get lost in tons of information that's out there, so I just concentrate on the two-deeps, collect info on players and coaches, write it down myself because it helps me remember it if I write it, and don't forget to enjoy the game.

"If you can do play-by-play really well, you can last a long, long time.- A career in broadcasting is not a sprint … it's a marathon."

College Sports: John Morris and Dave South

A good play-by-play broadcaster has in-depth and intricate knowledge of his or her team. The broadcaster knows about the history, tradition, personnel, can recite the most minute piece of trivia, relate personal stories, and is considered a walking, talking encyclopedia on the team.

– Baylor University broadcaster John Morris is guilty on all counts.

Morris graduated from Baylor and covered the Bears' athletic programs as Sports Director at Waco's CBS affiliate, KWTX-TV, from 1980 to 1995.– Morris joined the university as Director of Broadcasting in 1995 and assumed full-time play-by-play duties from the legendary Frank Fallon.– Morris had gotten some on-the-job training in play-by-play during his tenure at KWTX-TV, working as a color analyst with Fallon on various broadcasts and filling in for Fallon on Baylor basketball games from 1984 to 1994.– Morris has spent his entire adult life at, nearby, or

within, the Baylor athletic family.– As much as he knows about the history and tradition of Baylor sports, Morris doesn't let that knowledge factor into his preparation of game broadcasts.

"To me, it's a constant process of preparation," Morris explains.– "When people ask me how long do you prepare or each game, I don't really have an answer because it seems like I'm always in a state of gathering information, tidbits, facts, stats, et cetera.– Obviously, I use sources like the Internet, looking at the opponents' web-sites and newspaper stories from that area, teams' news releases, interviews, and casual conversations with coaches and players.– I like to organize things so that everything is in one place, most often on my spotter board. Instead of having to rummage through mounds of papers to look up a stat or a note, I try to make a note on the board so everything is right there in front of me.

"I do use a spotter board for each game.– Since I'm doing Baylor each week, I usually keep the same one and just change out the updated stats and notes pertaining to that particular game. Mine is pretty standard, I think.– I use squares for the positions with extra squares to take care of any oddball lineups, which seem to be more and more prevalent; things like name, height, weight, high school, then their stats or something of note about each guy.– Then, I use the area around the squares to write notes for myself about the team, the match-up, the coach, the series, anything like that that I want to remember.– If possible, I like to watch a tape—either a coaches' tape or a TV game tape—of the opponent to help me familiarize myself with the players and their numbers.– I like a TV broadcast especially ~~well~~ because then I can 'borrow' information that is used by those announcers!– Pre-game warm-ups are a very important time because the players are all out there, usually at their position, with jerseys on so I can again familiarize myself with names and numbers.– That goes for football, basketball, and baseball, which has now gone to wearing warm-ups or batting practice tops that don't show the numbers so you can't do as much there."

Because Morris broadcasts all Baylor football, basketball, and baseball games, he has a strong sense of how each sport should be presented on the air.

"In football, you are farther away from the field and you've got many more people to keep track of.– Also, there's more substituting, almost on every play.– But in football, there is a play, then a pause between plays.– To me, it's a natural play-by-play-then-color breakdown.

"In basketball, the pace is much faster but there are only ten players on the floor at a time, much less subbing but more of a running flow and not as natural a break for play-by-play and color.– The color analyst may be talking after a made bucket, then there's a steal in the backcourt and he'll have to stop in mid-sentence or pick up play-by-play of what's happening.– It's very fast-paced but that also makes for an exciting broadcast, if the game is halfway close.

"Baseball is very different in that the pace is much slower.– It allows for much more story-telling and adding color to the broadcast.– I believe in baseball, you have to have some experience with the team or the players to know the stories about them: for instance, traveling with a baseball team, then spending the entire weekend around them for a three-game series. You pick up a lot of information that you normally might not get just sitting down for a formal interview.

"I really like doing all three sports because they are so different from each other," Morris continued.– "One of the best things about my job at Baylor is that I get to change with the sports seasons and go from football to basketball to baseball with even a little overlap in between.– I like being versatile enough to do more than one sport and would hate to be pinned down to doing just one sport."

— Morris admits he's "spoiled" when it comes to keeping statistics.– The Big Twelve Conference uses stat monitors that keep running totals during football and basketball games, but Morris keeps his own basic stat book for basketball (points, rebounds, fouls) and a scorebook for baseball.

When it comes to calling the game, Morris strongly believes in the “eyes and ears” theory of play-by-play.

“It is the responsibility of the radio announcers to be the eyes and ears for the listener. Anything and everything that would be pertinent and interesting to the listener should be observed and passed along during the course of a broadcast. Certainly you start with the basics—score, time remaining, who has the ball, where is the ball, and then build upon that.

“I really appreciate the announcers who ‘paint the picture’ and make you feel like you are there. That is a great compliement if an announcer can do that for the listener.”

It also helps a broadcast if the color analyst and sideline reporter are working in tandem with the play-by-play announcer.

“To me, they are two more sets of eyes and ears to gather information and pass along to the listeners,” Morris said. “I think the play-by-play announcer must be the nuts-and-bolts of the broadcast, and then the three in concert add all the information that makes the broadcast entertaining and interesting to listen to. Our football color analyst ({[Walter Abercrombie})] and sideline analyst ({[Ricky Thompson})] here at Baylor are both former players, so they have that insight going into each broadcast. Plus, both are good friends and well-respected by our coaches so they get locker room access before games, during halftime, and after games. In basketball, our color analyst is Pat Nunley, who also played at Baylor and is not only knowledgeable about the game but Baylor University and its history and tradition, which gives him great perspective on situations. Pat is a guy who can, and does, sit down with the team and coaches to review tape and can understand what is going on and what the coaches are telling the players.”

Morris has sound advice for the beginning play-by-play broadcaster.

“Preparation is the key. That’s one of the main things I learned from Frank Fallon. If you are prepared, it will show and you’ll be more comfortable and be able to do your best job on a broadcast. You can never prepare too much. Use every minute available preparing.

"I think a broadcaster has to be himself or herself and not try to emulate and be someone else. I think that might work for a while but eventually, the true you will come through, good or bad. I would suggest listening to other announcers and listening with a critical ear, not just casually, and really learn from them.– I believe you can learn something from everyone you listen to.– I would also suggest always enjoy what you are doing.– Never let it become a job, if possible.– If you are enjoying the game as a broadcaster and enjoy being at the center of the action, that will be translated through your tone of voice and words to your listeners.– Have fun with games. Games are fun!"

Dave South would agree.– He's been a play-by-play broadcaster since 1960, and has called high school, college, and professional sports.– South has been the voice of Texas A & M sports since 1986, and carries the additional title of Associate Athletic Director for Sponsorships and Broadcast at the university.

South also stresses pre-game preparation as an essential element to a good broadcast.

"You cannot over-prepare.– If you have a lot of material left over at the end of the game, that's great. It means the game was a good one," South says.

"Just because you wrote all of the notes does not mean you have to read all of the notes. Don't lose contact with the game.– The game is what the listeners want to hear about.– Leave out the personal stuff: 'What a great meal I had last night'… who cares?– They ~~(~~[the listeners~~)~~] want the game, not your eating habits."

South broadcasts A & M football, men's basketball, and baseball, and he believes one sport's pre-game preparation is much more time-consuming than the others.

"Football requires a lot of prep work, more than the other two sports combined," South says. "Baseball requires a deep love for the game and you must have the gift of gab.– Baseball is second behind football in prep.– You can't just keep saying 'ball one, strike two, ball two, strike two.'– Basketball requires a quick tongue and not as much prep time."

South adds that a broadcaster should not feel obligated to use all the pre-game information he or she collects. He believes the closeness of the game impacts the game call.

"If the game is on the line, leave out notes, personal stories, no promos on the next broadcast, no scores from another game, no post-game promotions. Stay with the game!"

South does not use the traditional spotter board, feeling it takes too much time to locate players. He uses a numerical board: offense on one board, defense on the other. "I flip it over for the defense of the other team or offense of the other team. My board has enough blank space at the top and on the right side to include a lot of notes. I have designed all of this on a computer. I do one for basketball and baseball," South says.

Describing the mood for a game broadcast is important, too. South likes to begin early.

"Set the tone with your opening remarks right before kick-off, tip-off, or the first pitch. Remember, however, that the first play of the game is not the biggest play of the game. You must be the eyes and ears of all of those who are tuned into the radio. For example: the band is lining up outside the north end zone for halftime … a small dog has run out onto the field … the president is on the sideline watching the game … the 12th Man towels are up and being waved. All of that is important to paint the picture so the listeners can 'see' it on the radio."

During a football game broadcast, South is adamant about one important but often overlooked piece of information.

"Keep the score in front of the fans. On every first down, on every change of possession, on every time-out, going to a break and coming back from the break, give the score, time, and quarter. Fans tune in and out of a radio broadcast. They don't hang on your every word unless it has come down to the last minute of a close game, so give the score. Fans also let their minds wander in and out of the broadcast. Give the score!

"~~(~~[A broadcaster should not~~)~~] try to coach the game.– Broadcasters are not coaches.– Just report what has happened on the play.– Give the statistics.– Stats will tell fans if the team is doing well or not.

"Formations are important.– One-back, no backs, split backs, I-formation, motion from the slot man, left hash mark, right hash mark …give as much information as possible but the play is the thing.

"If a running back is getting big numbers, give those numbers.– If a defense is holding the running game down, give those numbers.

"On players: read the bios ~~(biographies)~~ on the two-deep players.– Look for small notes to throw in, such as 'his dad played for the opposing school'…' 'so-and-so needs five receptions to become the all-time leader for his school.'– All this is true for all sports."

One would think that after forty-plus years in sports play-by-play, Dave South wouldn't be too concerned about his game call.– But the veteran broadcaster leaves nothing to chance.

"I listen to every broadcast from beginning to end," South says.– "I close my eyes with the idea of seeing the play being described.– I also pay an outside consultant to listen to three football games and two basketball games a year.– He picks the games, I don't.– I am constantly looking for a better way to do everything.– Something will change on every broadcast every year."

South advises play-by-play hopefuls to leave the coaching to the coaches.

"Don't coach from the broadcast booth.– You are not a coach.– Two years of high school football on the junior varsity does not make you a coach.– Just report what you see and let the fans decide whether they like it or not."

The ability to speak well and to speak without notes are two additional attributes to Dave South's long and successful career in sports play-by-play announcing; attributes he would recommend to future play-by-play broadcasters.

"I took lots of speech classes, I was on the debate team, and I have a great ad lib ability.– I had the best speech professors you can find anywhere.– If you can't ad lib and think quickly on your feet, you're in trouble.– I can do anything in the broadcast booth~~;~~ ~~—~~stats, engineering, color, spotter.– Little can happen in the booth after ~~40~~forty-plus years that I could not handle. As the play-by-play guy, you must be willing to take charge of the radio booth and make quick decisions, sometimes in as little as ~~15~~fifteen seconds."

Hockey: The Coolest Call on Ice

Hockey is still considered by many sports fans as a Canadian spectacle, but there is no denying the game's popularity throughout the United States.– At any given time, there are more than one hundred professional hockey teams operating within the U~~.~~nited S~~.~~tates, representing as many as five different leagues and covering non-hockey regions.– In football-mad Texas, for example, every major city is or has been home to a professional hockey franchise, and smaller cities are home to a variety of minor league teams.

Hockey teams also mean hockey play-by-play opportunities.– Because hockey is not usually played at middle or high school levels in southern states, most people are not directly exposed to the game and therefore are probably not knowledgeable in the rules and nuances of the sport. This should not discourage play-by-play hopefuls, however.– Studying a rules book, watching and listening to hockey broadcasts, and researching the history of the game are several ways for play-by-play broadcasters to gain familiarity with the sport, and enhance the possibilities of getting a broadcasting position with a team.

For this special section, three hockey broadcasters were consulted: Ken Double, former Director of Broadcasting and long-time play-by-play voice of the Houston Aeros; Ralph Strangis, play-by-play voice of the National Hockey League's Dallas Stars; and Pete Weber, play-by-play voice for the NHL's Nashville Predators.– They bring a combined ~~50~~fifty years of hockey broadcasting to their jobs, among other play-by-play duties, and have a keen sense of what makes a hockey broadcast different from other sports.

Double, an Indiana native, worked in small market radio as a high school football and basketball before becoming a television sports anchor.– Double has broadcast Purdue University basketball and the NBA's Indiana Pacers games before calling hockey.– He has worked for the International Hockey League on its ~~"~~*Game of the Week*~~"~~ telecasts and for hockey teams in Indianapolis, Atlanta, Chicago (~~-~~the NHL's Blackhawks), and Jacksonville, before joining the Aeros in 2000.– He left the franchise in 2008.

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—Strangis broadcast college hockey as a student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in the early 1980s, moved on to high school hockey and football on regional cable television operations in Minnesota, and became the voice of a women's professional volleyball league in the mid-80s, because "I never said 'no' to any play-by-play job, and I did high school volleyball games for cable TV in Minnesota and was discovered there!" Strangis also called professional wrestling in Minneapolis-Saint Paul before auditioning and getting the color analyst position for

the NHL's Minnesota North Stars in 1990.– He remained with the franchise when it relocated to Dallas and became its play-by-play broadcaster in 1996.

Weber joined the expansion Predators in 1997 after serving as the play-by-play broadcaster for the Buffalo Sabres (1995–1997), the host of "Hockey Night with the Buffalo Sabres" from 1990–1993, and as an analyst for the Los Angeles Kings (1978–1981).– In addition, Weber has broadcasted games for such diverse organizations as the NFL's Buffalo Bills, the Seattle SuperSonics of the NBA, the University of Buffalo, the University of Notre Dame, and the minor league baseball franchise in Nashville (the Sounds).

All three men agree that pre-game preparation is crucial for any successful broadcast.– The Stars' Strangis has a simple rule of thumb: "Prepare at least as long as you'll be on the air.– A three-hour game means you'll need to spend three hours preparing for the game, or you won't be ready to broadcast.

"I think hockey play-by-play is 90 percent preparation and ten percent game call," Strangis continues. -"The Stars pay me to do prep work. -I do the games for free!"

The Aeros' Double adds that the Internet has been a huge benefit in gathering pre-game information from other teams.– "The Internet brings out-of-town newspapers to our fingertips, so we can do some homework that way.– For hockey, it's a good way of finding out an important part of the game, like what are the line combinations––which player is centering between which two forwards."

Because Double served as public relations director for the Aeros, he was constantly exposed to players' notes and statistics on a daily basis.– Double prepared game notes packages and ~~their teams'~~ player biographies for their media guides.– But, as with all sports, it seems getting detailed information with the opposition was spotty at times.– The "behind-the-scenes" stuff that can add to a broadcast is difficult to get if the other team doesn't share that type of information, and usually it won't.

Most hockey teams have a morning warm-up and practice session before a game, called a skate-around. All three broadcasters attend the skate-arounds. The Stars' Strangis talks to players, coaches, and media members of both teams during the skate-arounds, looking to get some insight or additional information that can be used during the game broadcast.

As far as using a spotter board, all three men use a different system. Double used a business flip-file (KARDEX) and he creates a 4 ~~by 5~~ × 5 card. "Across the bottom of the card, I have the players' numbers in red, followed by name and position. Then, I put height, weight, age, and number of years pro. Then, I put stats like goals, assists, points, power play goals, short-handed goals, and penalty minutes," Double says.

"The bottom of each card with information is visible. Thus, on the left side of this long flip-file chart, I put all the Aeros players. On the right side, I put the opponents. If I need specific information on a particular player, I find his card, 'flip' up the file, and now, that bottom line plus the full card is visible. On the card I have tons of background information like birthdate, family, draft, and trade info, career highlights, last season's stats, things like that. It's a wealth of information at my fingertips in a simple format. It's the best system I've ever seen." Double attributes his spotter board to long-time NBA announcer Jerry Gross.

Weber uses a simple-looking team depth chart with basic player information, such as height, weight, hometown, and how their particular team acquired them (draft pick, trade, free agent). "One thing you will notice is that there isn't much time in a hockey broadcast itself to deliver stories—less on radio where you need to describe the action and paint the picture, than on TV," Weber adds.

Strangis has another way of using information. "I like statistics, but I don't want to be married to them. I like to use stats that leap off the page at you. I'll write complete sentences for notes instead of just writing a stat, and I'll use those sentences during my broadcast." All

three men agree that there is no “set” spotter board system; they’ve developed their own techniques over the years and advise any broadcaster to use whatever system feels comfortable.

Hockey is no different when broadcasters talk about setting the mood for a broadcast.

Double learned in college that “when doing a remote, rule number one is ~~‘~~describe your surroundings.~~–~~ So I describe the arena, my seating location and vantage point.~~–~~ I always make the distinction between the home team in white and the visiting team in whatever color it’s wearing.~~–~~ The job as play-by-play announcer is to bring the listener right into the game, and indeed, describing all aspects of your surroundings is part of that.~~–~~ For football and baseball, where the weather can be a critical piece of the outcome, that also becomes very important. Don’t we know how a change in the wind, or a drizzle turned into a deluge, can affect the outcome of a game?”

Strangis uses pre-game warm-ups as a time to double-check names and numbers.~~–~~ “I also do a mock play-by-play while the teams are warming up, and I also use that time to work on difficult name pronunciations.”

Weber keeps it basic: “This is where we are, this is tonight’s opponent, the Predators have not fared well here against this team in the past, the Red Wings have been hot or the Avalanche have struggled of late, etc.”

~~–~~ But Weber prepares for a broadcast like a coaching staff might~~–~~by scouting the opposition.

“I try to see at least two games of the opposing team, or portions of those games, prior to the Preds playing them.~~-~~ For this, I am wedded to the *NHL’s Center Ice* program, either on line or via DirecTV at home.~~–~~ I use two DVRs here ~~(~~[at the arena~~)~~], each of which can record games simultaneously.~~–~~ From those viewings, I create the charts ~~(~~[to use during the game~~)~~].~~–~~ I probably am more into combinations than numbers of players, getting familiar with the way they move, etc.

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"More time is required for an Eastern Conference club ~~(~~as we play ~~18~~eighteen of ~~82~~eighty-two games against the Eastern Conference~~)~~, than a Western Conference opponent we play frequently ~~(~~[Nashville plays in the NHL's Western Conference~~)~~]. – Let's just say that the I~~i~~nternet and satellite TV have been a godsend!"

Calling a hockey game is a challenge. – It is perhaps the most difficult sport to broadcast because of the speed of the game and the constant flow of action. – In Pete Weber's eyes, "number one on radio is geography – – where is the puck and who has it? – The idea is to not get too narrowed in your focus – – long before high-definition television and its 16:9 aspect ratio. – I have often thought in terms of 'cinemascope' for my focus, so that I see more of the ice. – The puck is always going to be the focus, but you need to see the overall picture to be able to anticipate what will happen with it.

"Like Walter Gretzky drummed into his son Wayne: 'go where the puck is going to be, not where it is,'" Weber says.

Double believes his job is to "paint the word picture for the audience. – It's my job to put the puck on the right guy's stick. – I watch the puck. – I keep the audience aware of several things constantly, like which direction the teams are going. – If someone is home or driving and listening, it's crucial in trying to imagine and visualize the action, to know which way the team is attacking. – With hockey, the lines change every ~~60~~sixty seconds, so it's important to announce not only that fresh players are over the boards, but announce the line combinations so fans know who's out there with whom, particularly if the team's top scoring unit is on the ice."

Double admits that the speed of the game and the frequency of offensive possession make broadcasting hockey a true challenge.

"Self editing is crucial," Double says. – "One cannot describe EVERY pass of the puck. You'd drive your audience crazy. – To be smooth and effective, one must use lots of generalizations in describing the movement of the puck. – The puck caroms around in haphazard fashion, unlike

basketball, where the play is much more deliberate and planed.– It's sometimes more important in hockey to tell the audience WHERE the puck is as opposed to WHO'S got it."

Double rates each sport by degree of difficulty, from hardest to easiest:

Baseball: "You'd better have stories and tons of information on each player."

Hockey: "Five new players over the boards every ~~6~~sixty~~0~~ seconds, and who knows where the silly

~~————————~~thing is going next."

Football:~~-~~ "Nothing for ~~30~~thirty seconds…then ~~22~~twenty-two guys all move at once."

Basketball: "Easy…five players each, a big ball, a systematic game that moves quickly."

The Stars' Strangis agrees that the frantic pace of hockey is the toughest aspect of broadcasting its games.

"Hockey is more play-by-play driven.– It's less anecdotal than other sports.– There's more pin-balling in hockey.– You can set plays in other sports.– Hockey has a lot of variables other sports don't have.– It's played in an enclosed space, it has large men skating as fast as ~~30~~thirty miles per hour, hitting a puck at ~~100~~ one hundred miles an hour or faster.– Hockey players move much faster than other players in other sports. There's not much continuity in hockey, either. It's constantly moving and very haphazard.– As a broadcaster, you'd better concentrate and call the game.

"In football and basketball you're calling the ball.– In hockey, you're calling off the puck.– If you know who's on the puck, you can look off or away from the puck and look at who's going to get the next pass."

Nashville's Weber tends to agree.

"Hockey is a game that forces quick decisions on the broadcaster, or else you can get so bogged down you will need five minutes to catch up.– Then, it's time for a commercial. However, you can anticipate a 'slower time,' when you can work in '~~(~~[David~~)~~] Legwand going

back to the bench, {[Jason]} Arnott takes his spot.'– When a player takes another out, that's usually with the puck involved, so that's what you should be calling.– If that isn't the case, the referee should be calling interference.

"Following the action will oftentimes take you out of following a developing fight behind the play–, but that's the analyst's job– to have an even wider view than mine."

As in any other sport, all three announcers critique themselves by listening to game broadcasts or by sending their tapes to other broadcasters for their input.– Play-by-play broadcasting is an inexact science, and everyone in the profession is willing to improve his or her skills and techniques.

Double broadcasted games for radio and television and noted that there are big differences between the two mediums, regardless of sport.

"Radio is totally different than television.– In radio, you paint word pictures.– TV is the color analyst's medium, as people can see the play.– Know the difference.– If you're doing a telecast, it's a good idea to shut up …a lot!

"If you're doing radio, draw a sketch of the playing surface, and then write down at least three different ways of describing the main parts of the surface.– This will help you 'paint the word picture' and also help you avoid using the same terms over and over.

"On radio, do not use numbers when identifying players.– Listeners can-not see the numbers. On TV, definitely use the numbers to help views identify what they are seeing.

"Make a note of the vocal scale.– Doing a game is like presenting a good play.– There are high points and low points, and usually a climactic scene at the end.– If you are screaming on the first play, what have you left yourself for the game-winning score at the end?– Keep things under control.– Hit the high point only when it's necessary.

"Don't be too critical of players, and certainly the coaches.– My philosophy has always been, 'I never played the game professionally.– What do I know?– Just put the puck on the right guy's stick.'

"The two P's are Preparation and Pacing.– Know the names and numbers or you will spend the whole game just trying to figure out who's out there.– Pacing is essential.– Remember, all your verbiage is going into someone's ear.– If it's unintelligible or unlistenable, you have accomplished nothing."

The Stars' Strangis adds that simple facts must become part of the game broadcast.

"People don't know what team Johnson plays for.– Say the team's name.– Kids now just say a player's name.– Step back and re-set the game.– Give the time, score, and shots on goal.

"Kids who get into play-by-play today are watching TV people do play-by-play and most of them aren't that good.– My number one tip: listen to radio!– Listen to national and local game broadcasts on radio.

"Learn to enunciate correctly.– A broadcaster who's on his game is speaking in active voice. Broadcasters now are so poorly trained that they're speaking in past tense, and most guys can't stay current with the game call.

"The hardest part about the job is separating each game.– There are a lot of games in a hockey season, and it's difficult sometimes to go from game to game without getting confused.– ({[Long-time network announcer}] Pat Summerall and I were talking about the late Lindsey Nelson once, who did football and basketball games for many years.– Someone asked him how he was able to remember as much information about each player and team, even though he was doing different sports?– He said, 'It's not now much I can remember, it's how quickly I can forget.'– I look at it this way: it's like taking a final exam every game.– You remember so much information for one night, and then you have to forget it and begin memorizing completely different information for the next night.

"I see a broadcast as an orchestra.– The crowd is the string section, the sounds of play are the woodwind section, and the play-by-play is the French horn.– I provide the spark that makes the game fun to listen to, but I always remember that it's not about me.– The play-by-play person is not the game.– The game is what matters.

"I'm a wordsmith by nature.– I love language.– I'm always checking myself on my use of words, phraseology, appropriate descriptions, and things like that.– I'd advise anyone interested in doing play-by-play to appreciate the language and learn to enunciate correctly.– We broadcasters are truly the last guardians of the language.– If we don't know how to speak correctly, who else will?"

Weber calls himself "a child of radio.– I grew up in the Midwest, going across the dial of the Zenith at home, brining in all the games I could.– As ~~(~~[Los Angeles Dodgers' play-by-play broadcaster~~)~~] Vin Scully said, ~~(~~ and I'm paraphrasing~~)~~: 'On radio, the broadcaster has a blank canvas and a palette of paint.– It's up to you to re-create the entire picture.– On television, the pictures are selected for you and the audience, and you add the appropriate captions.'

"Yet, in hockey on TV, I am not staring at the monitor, because I might miss something."

And, like other professionals, Weber is constantly seeking improvement in his work.

"I record most games and listen back to portions of them~~–~~, particularly if I have an empty feeling that I messed up.– I listen to comments from others, but focus on my own evaluation because I am probably harder on myself.

Soccer: A Real Kick!

Soccer is similar to hockey in that ~~there~~ it tends to take place on a large playing area and has little scoring.~~–~~ But a soccer field is much bigger than either a hockey rink or a football field, and this presents a daunting task for the soccer play-by-play broadcaster.

~~—~~ Veteran television sports anchor Steve Mark was the play-by-play voice of Major League Soccer's Houston Dynamo in 2008 and 2009 … and it was strictly by accident.

"I applied for a position with the Chicago Fire," Mark recalls.~~-~~ "The general manager there was best friends with the general manager in Houston and the general manager in Houston interviewed me on behalf of his Chicago counterpart. ~~-~~As it turned out, Chicago wanted to hire someone already in the market. ~~-~~When Houston needed another public relations person to also do play-by-play, it worked out!"

One would think Mark's professional background~~—–~~nearly ~~30~~thirty years as a TV sports anchor at stations in Austin, Texas; Tulsa, Oklahoma~~;~~, and three affiliates in Houston, along with limited radio and play-by-play experience, none of which included soccer~~—–~~would have been a huge drawback.~~–~~ Although Mark understands soccer and its rules, preparing for radio broadcasts is a different animal altogether.~~–~~ That's where his television background comes into play.

As in organizing and producing sportscasts and ~~30~~thirty-minute sports magazine shows for television, organizing and producing a radio broadcast for soccer follows the same formula: ~~d~~Do your homework and be ready!

"Preparation is my thing, and I am quite maniacal about it for a number of reasons.~~–~~ There are no breaks during the broadcast except at halftime, so there is little opportunity to take a moment and thumb through media guides to get information.~~–~~ So my [~~(~~spotter~~)~~] boards are extensive. Also; we do not get starting lineups until ~~45~~ forty-five minutes before game time.~~–~~ They are not official until the officials meeting, which is held one hour before game time.~~–~~ Our pregame show starts ~~25~~ twenty-five minutes before game time, so it is impossible to get the lineups and start a board from scratch.~~–~~ So, I start the day before a game working on my spotting board with the

lineups the coach provides the league on the comprehensive packet the league releases on each game the Thursday before each Saturday match.– One board has only player info and league-related statistics.– The other board has team information, streaks, superlatives, and tendencies. This is in addition to another sheet that has updated live sponsor reads and team announcements. We also have a league-only site that updates every piece of soccer-related written and broadcast material, and I scour that each day but more intensively before games."

Geography also played into Mark's pre-game preparation.

"Game days are different at home versus on the road.– At home, players and coaches arrive at the stadium two hours before start time.– I tape a pre-game radio segment with our coach exactly two hours before game time.– It is the first thing the coach does when he arrives, and it is our routine so we get it over with.– Then, I tape another segment with one of our players for pre-game, and sometimes a third taping for a halftime interview.– We try to do interviews at halftime live with a celebrity, injured player or team-related person, but sometimes those are on tape. With this in mind, I always arrive at the stadium three hours before game time to set up my computer, organize my part of the booth, and other things.

"On the road, our team always has an 11 a.m. team walk ~~(~~at the stadium~~)~~ before a night game. When the walk ends at 11:15, I tape the coach's interview and then a player interview.– I try not to do those when they get to the stadium to avoid any unforeseen glitches.– When I'm on the road, I always hire an engineer from that city and sometimes they are not able to feed tape through the computer as quickly as we do at home.

Unlike most other sports, a soccer field encompasses a large amount of real estate. That alone would make any soccer broadcast a challenge.– There is also one other often overlooked but significant difference between soccer and other sports.

"Soccer play-by-play is totally unlike any other sport for the simple reason that there are no breaks once each half starts," Mark says.– "At least in hockey there are stops in the action for

media timeouts.– Football has breaks throughout quarters and of course, in baseball, there are lots of opportunities to regroup.– In soccer, the action is constant and demanding on the throat.– I'm generally good in that regard unless there is a game that goes into overtime.– Those games generally mean a sore throat until the next morning!"

—— Those long stretches and lack of breaks make the typical soccer broadcast more untraditional than baseball or football. But the actual call of the game is similar to all sports… find the action, follow the ball, and check on non-game activity once in a while.

"While I am mainly focused on the ball and the flow of the game, there is always periphery to keep an eye on," Mark explains.– "Things like temperament of the bench, players warming up for substitution, abnormal fan action, and the wind are things I look for.– Instead of keeping ~~a~~ binoculars on the player with the ball, even though sometimes I really need ~~it~~to since the action is sometimes far away and the numbers are difficult to ascertain without help, I try to watch the whole field of play.– It is a better way to see the attack unfold.– I had a color guy who does about half the games; most of the opportunity for color is when play is between the 30's at midfield. When plays unfold on the attack there is rarely time for color, though there are brief stoppages during corner kicks and free kicks."

Even non-soccer followers are familiar with the now-famous "Gggggooooooaaaaallllll!" call that typically follows a score.– There are so few goals scored in a typical soccer match that every goal seems to become a broadcast in itself.– So how does a soccer play-by-play person keep excitement and flow in those times where there is very little action?– Mark believes the game lends itself to certain pacing levels.

"In soccer, there is a built-in crescendo for emotion with a goal or a huge play, so you have to pace the tone and excitement," Mark says.– "Play in the middle of the field generally goes with a lower tone and less excitement and creates more time for analysis.– Once a player crosses the 30, it is time to rev up the excitement."

A lot of planning goes into the pre-game setup for a soccer broadcast (or any broadcast, for that matter).– But what happens after the game itself?– The post-game show can be a juggling act for the broadcaster, even with some organized schedule in mind.– ~~Mark explained how he handled the Dynamo post-game.~~

"Our post-game show is quite lengthy and I do the interviews with the players live, with me still in the booth.– Sometimes our post-game show lasts ~~30~~ thirty minutes with call-ins and live interviews.– We have an assistant on the field grabbing players live.– I have a spotter and statistics person in the booth who communicates with that person for interviews," Mark explains.

"I used to finish the post-game show and get to the team bus for the ride back to the hotel. But, our post-game show went so long that the team bus would leave before I'm done.– So I generally rode to and from games in a separate car.– The road trips are fun, but sometimes painstaking because of the constant arranging of engineering assistance.– That burden is on the team, not the broadcast outlet."

Soccer probably provides a play-by-play broadcaster the most difficult set of circumstances when it comes to the actual broadcast.– Consider the size of the field,– the near-absence of scoring, and the lack of play stoppages; many would see these as negatives. b.– ~~B~~ut Mark believes otherwise.– In fact, he sees a real opportunity for a wordsmith to shine and hone a craft that many feel is the most intriguing element of any play-by-play broadcast.

"You have to spend a great deal of time painting the picture of location.– A baseball broadcaster only has to locate the ball once, when it is hit.– In soccer, the ball is in constantly moving quadrants.– You have to continually be on top of that–– near side, far side, right of midfield, left of midfield, attacking third, defensive third, far side of the box, near side of the box. In a radio broadcast that is a key demand of a broadcaster.

"The easiest aspect of broadcasting soccer?– The fast and constant pace creates few lulls in the call."

Mark believes that a basketball or hockey play-by-play person could easily adapt those broadcasting skills to soccer.– And with the growth of collegiate and professional soccer in the U-nited S-tates, opportunities would only seem to improve during the next few years.

Racing: Horse and Horsepower

It's rare to find a broadcaster who calls races of the mechanized and the four-legged kind, but Kurt Becker is such an announcer.– Becker has spent his professional career as a broadcaster for horse racing and auto racing.– A rare combination, indeed!– How did this come about?

"I am a graduate of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale," Becker said.– "I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts-Political Science.– My goal, at the time, was to be a political writer and commentator.– Having said that, I had an interest in horse racing from childhood, as my father was a standardbred ~~(~~[trotters and pacers~~)~~] announcer at various ~~M~~midwestern fairs, as well as Lexington's Red Mile Harness Track [~~(~~Kentucky~~)~~].

"My first job calling pari-mutuel ~~(~~[betting~~)~~] races actually came at Red Mile in May of 1988. The late General Manager, Curt Greene, had become aware of me in the summer of 1987, when he heard me calling harness races at the Illinois State Fair.– I had begun calling races in 1985 on the Illinois county fair circuit, alongside my father, Carl Becker, with the goal of developing sufficient experience to announce pari-mutuel horse races and NASCAR events."

Since those humble beginnings, Becker has greatly expanded his broadcasting portfolio.– He has served as the track announcer for thoroughbred meets at Arlington Park, Sportsman's Park and Hawthorne Racecourse, all in Chicago; Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky; and Keeneland Racecourse in Lexington, Kentucky.– He's also announced on an interim or substitute basis at race tracks in New York (Belmont Park), Cincinnati (Turfway Park), and St. Louis (Fairmount Park).– But Keeneland in Lexington is Becker's home base, and has been since 1997, where he also co-broadcasts that track's highly-regarded thoroughbred auctions (~~and has~~ since 2000).

And that's just horse racing!

Becker also stays quite busy as a broadcaster for auto racing events around the country, as the play-by-play announcer for NASCAR's Motor Racing Network (MRN), a position he's held

since 1994.– And if that wasn't enough, Becker has been an announcer for the Barrett-Jackson Classic Automobile Auction since 2006.

Now, on the surface, one might wonder how horse racing and auto racing tie into each other. Sure, they're racing, but not at all similar, right?– After all, one race involves no more than a dozen (at times) horses and riders galloping around a track in a race that might last two minutes at best.– The other race involves thirty to forty~~30–40~~ cars, hitting speeds of close to ~~200~~two hundred miles per hour, moving around a track in a race that might last three hours.– And how in the world could someone be adept at broadcasting two sports that seem so completely different?

Becker provides a fairly obvious answer.

"John McMullin, the former General Manager of MRN Radio, told me that my horse racing background helped equip me for announcing NASCAR events, and I would agree.– Specifically, John commented that I had an advantage insofar as I was accustomed to the use of binoculars and I was used to describing fast-paced action.– He said that one of my colleagues gained a similar advantage from having previous experience with professional hockey.– Thus, I would suggest that any and all play-by-play experience can be valuable in paying dividends down the road.

"At the same time, the most difficult transition for me was going from a 'public address' style of delivery in horse racing to the conventional style required for a NASCAR radio broadcast. Put another way–, horse racing is more of a 'nuts-and-bolts' type of call in the span of roughly 60– to 120 seconds, while NASCAR on the radio requires more colorful descriptions and such in the span of a two- to– three–hour broadcast."

Becker prepares for a day at the races (that's horse races) by starting early.– In fact, his pre-game prep sounds very much like a head football coach's preparation for a game.

"I will actually begin on the prior evening by watching videotape of the horses on websites such as "racereplays.com," Becker says.– "My primary purpose is to get a feel for a given horse's running style––particularly those who are entered for 'feature' events of 'stakes' races––while

also listening to audio for clues on pronunciations of awkward or unusual names.– Many horses, for example, take their names from foreign languages.

"My conversation with owners, trainers, and jockeys is limited, save for the occasional call to the jockeys' quarters to check the pronunciation of a rider's name.– My dialogue with other members of the industry is limited primarily because a race call has room for little else besides a concise description of how the race is unfolding.– I do not use a spotter board, although I write the names of each horse and jockey, for any given race, on a piece of white, 8 ½ ×~~x~~ 11 inch printing paper.– Writing each name in this fashion tends to help my memorization process, and it's also easier to keep a single sheet of paper between one's fingers for reference during the race call, as opposed to fumbling with a cumbersome track program.– I will also make notations next to the horse's name, such as– the color of a piece of equipment which is prominently displayed on the horse's face or body, such as a nose band, a shadow roll, a bridle, or a set of blinkers, and I will make note of the color of the jockey's cap.– I note the latter because even when the jockey is hunched low around the horse's withers and neck, one can almost always use the color of this cap as a means of identification."

Calling an auto race does provide easier access to cars' colors and numbers, but Becker says the prep is much more information-oriented.

"Prepping for a NASCAR radio broadcast requires far more in the way of conversation and dialogue with the participants.– Again, in the course of a two- to three-hour broadcast, one will come to points where ~~(~~the broadcaster~~)~~ needs to explain certain aspects of the race—things like pit stops, mechanical failures, fuel mileage, tire wear, sanctions and penalties, etc.—to the listening audience, and this simply cannot be achieved without spending time in the garage area speaking with drivers, crew chiefs, and officials," Becker adds.

The pace of each race is dramatically different, and that provides an element to a broadcast that is not found in other sports.– Top level NASCAR drivers in certain races can reach speeds in

excess of 200 miles per hour.– Obviously, no race horse will ever get close to that speed.– So how does a broadcaster keep up… or is it even possible to do so?

—— "The biggest challenge for me has been learning to pace my delivery in order to give myself time to sort through things whenever there is a problem," Becker says.– "As former MRN colleague Allen Bestwick once said regarding NASCAR races, 'Just because the cars are going 200 miles an hour doesn't mean you have to describe things at the same pace.– You have to get whatever is happening on the track to slow down in your brain; give yourself time to process it.'"

Becker attributes another important pacing tip to a colleague at MRN when it comes to nailing a race—any type of race.

"John McMullin taught me the value, whether it's horse racing or NASCAR, of being specific.– During one of the first NASCAR broadcasts I ever worked, I kept saying, 'Michael Waltrip leads, and it's a little bit further back to Jeff Burton in second.'– As Mr. McMullin emphasized, the phrase 'a little bit further back' doesn't tell the listener anything.– He told me instead to be specific, such as 'ten car lengths' or 'half a straightaway', so the listener can visualize what's happening."

Specificity in calling a horse race adds not only detail, but color, to the broadcast.– Becker makes it a point to describe as much information during a race as is possible, without forgetting the most important element of the broadcast—which horse is in which position?

"I am primarily watching the jockeys during the course of a race, as I tend to identify horses mainly via the colors and designs on the silks which the jockeys wear," Becker says.– "I also take note of whether the jockey appears relaxesd and has an easy hold on his horse, or whether he is struggling to restrain his mount.– In this same vein, I will also try to note if a horse appears relaxesd, or whether it's tense and upset, as evidenced by tossing its head or fighting against the jockey's attempts to restrain it.– I will also look away from the horses from time to time, in order

to note the fractional times posted on the infield tote board for the opening quarter mile and the opening half mile.

"The biggest challenge of calling a horse race is to keep your eyesight and your memory skills firing so that you aren't caught off-guard.~~–~~ For example, sometimes one can see a horse and jockey plainly, yet the name of the horse just won't come to mind.~~–~~ Other times, one could likely remember the name of the horse if only he could get a better look at him!

"Another challenge of calling a horse race which is particularly daunting is the attempt to identify fast-closing horses in a timely fashion.~~–~~ One of the most embarrassing feelings for a track announcer is when a horse rallies from off the pace in the homestretch for a victory, and the announcer is practically the last guy in the house to notice him, or more accurately, the last guy in the building to realize the horse's identity.~~–~~ As for calling ~~9~~nine to ~~10~~ten races per day, each race is truly unique and presents its own set of circumstances, and there ~~is~~are roughly ~~20~~twenty to ~~25~~twenty-five minutes separating each event.~~–~~ Thus, the announcer generally has plenty of time to relax, turn attention to what's happening next, and therefore to be prepared adequately.

"And again, with horse racing, one only has to worry about a call which will last a minute or two, so as long as ~~(the announcer)~~one spends that ~~25~~ twenty-five minutes focusing on names and jockeys' silks, one should be in pretty decent shape.~~–~~ If one has to fill time like a baseball or football announcer between plays, or if one had to call ~~40~~forty minutes of action, such as one sees in a college basketball contest, then calling those ~~9~~nine to ~~10~~ten horse races per day would certainly present a new set of challenges," Becker says.

Auto racing ~~on the radio~~ presents another obvious difference~~–~~—the length of the race itself. A good play-by-play radio broadcaster has to keep the audience in mind when calling a game, whether it's baseball, football, basketball, or NASCAR.~~–~~ It would be foolish to assume the radio audience remains constant throughout a three-hour auto race broadcast, and Becker is aware of this.

"In the course of a two- to three-hour broadcast, one must constantly make sense of what has transpired since the start of the race, especially given the fact that listeners are continually tuning into the broadcast, and dropping out again, at various points during the event. Thus, I will often nod my head with appreciation when any given sports announcer does a 'reset' in which there is a recap of how the score or the storyline has developed to that particular point of the broadcast. As far as the play-by-play itself, the part which generally gets my attention is when an announcer has to describe that defining moment of the contest—the home run, the touchdown pass, the interception, the strikeout with the bases loaded, etc.

"The reason I mention this," Becker says, "is because of the fact that it's difficult to describe those moments in the proper tone without either being shrill, on one hand, or overly casual, on the other. Some announcers have the gift of simply changing their inflection and instantly bringing the listener to the edge of his or her seat, and I have great respect for those who possess such abilities. Finding the proper words—both in quality and quantity—and the proper tone in such instances remains one of the biggest challenges for me on a day-to-day basis."

A common critique of all sports broadcasters is the dependence and overuse of the standard and very tired sports clichés that have seemingly been passed from generation to generation. Becker is more than aware of this situation and purposely avoids leaning on the old standbys at all times. Becker says he learned from his father how to get around getting on the cliché train.

"My father taught me never to script a call, but instead to allow the race to come to me," Becker remembers. "John McMullin, when he was at MRN Radio, put it in a slightly different way, saying, 'Just call what you see.'"

It also helps to maintain your wits about you when calling high-intensity events such as horse racing or auto racing. It would be easy to get caught up in the pacing and euphoria of a fast-paced race, but Becker believes one trait can help a broadcaster get through it.

"The biggest factor is arguably the ability to relax.– Mr. McMullin used to tell me, above all else, to relax.– He could sense that I would become tense, and it affected everything from my breathing, to my pacing and timing, to the flow of my speech patterns.– Whether it's calling horses or automobiles, the announcers ~~whom~~ I've most enjoyed through the years were the ones who sounded just as relaxed and confident at the microphone whether they were calling a claiming race or a stakes race… a qualifying run involving a single car, or a three-wide pack heading into turn one on race night.– If you've got the ability to relax at the microphone, it will go a long way toward helping anyone of any background adjust to announcing horse races, NASCAR races, or any other sports for that matter."

Clich~~é~~és are one thing, but what happens to the credibility of a play-by-play announcer when personal feelings get on the air?– Can the broadcaster's opinion affect a broadcast?– Should a play-by-play broadcaster give an opinion?– Becker says no.

"I will try to simply tell what I see, without casting judgments, editorializing, or making pejorative statements.– I will convey the information as best as I can to the public, but I will allow them to make their own judgment calls as to how these developments could impact the outcome of the race.– On the most fundamental level, I strive for clarity and accuracy, and specifically to let the bettor (when calling a horse race) know the position of his or her horse. For example, is the horse against the rail for a ground saving trip, or is the horse caught wide around the turn?– Is the horse a length off the lead, or 10 lengths off the lead?– It is also worth noting that one must be careful about boastful predictions in the homestretch.– In other words, it can very embarrassing to declare that a horse is making a 'huge run' on the outside, only for the horse to tire suddenly in the closing strides and post a disappointing finish.– Again, it's why the golden rule of 'tell what you see' is so important.– Describe what's happening, instead of predicting what you think will happen."

And like all good play-by-play broadcasters, Becker is constantly striving for improvement. Like most, he'll critique his own work.– Like others, he also listens to others in the profession. Becker is listening not only to his calls, but specifically what he calls.

"More than anything, I'm listening for the repetitive use of 'crutch' words and phrases.– For example, it might be something in a horse race such as using the phrase 'right there' or 'up close' too many times in a given call.– In a NASCAR broadcast, it might be overuse of a phrase such as 'really tough break' or 'what an exciting race.'– And I enjoy the chance to listen to other broadcasters and announcers, although I listen in an attempt to learn their general approach to the job, as opposed to learning the use of specific terms and phrases for use in my own play-by-play. I will listen to how a baseball announcer will fill time during a break in the action, and perhaps I will apply it to a NASCAR event when the race is under a caution flag.– Did (the baseball announcer) tell humorous anecdotes?– Describe the weather?– Recap the game to that particular point?– Involve other broadcasters in the discussion?– Talk about the upcoming schedule?

"As for horse racing, I probably still learn the most by listening to tapes of my father's calls. He had a tremendous grasp of how to do the job, and I will occasionally pull videotapes off the shelf and listen to him just as a 'refresher' course on the fundamentals of calling a horse race."

Kurt Becker is quite aware of the difficulty of breaking into the play-by-play business, and his advice to hopeful broadcasters works for all sports, but especially in a smaller circuit such as racing.

"Just get experience wherever you can get it.– Don't even worry so much about what the job pays.– Just get the experience, because it can pay great dividends down the road.– Most of my early experience in announcing came at the county fair level, where horses were racing for $500 or $1,000 per dash.– It was often an unpredictable and even chaotic environment, but it taught me some wonderful lessons in coping with broadcasting adversity and dealing with the unexpected. One might also consider volunteering to assist a broadcasting crew on a race weekend, just o get

a chance to learn from first-hand observation about the broadcasting business.– John McMullin and his successor, David Hyatt, have developed a number of announcers at MRN Radio through the years after noticing such things as an individual's work ethic, desire, and general attitude. As a college professor of mine was fond of saying, 'It's not who you know … it's who knows you!'"

You have some samples of your work, also known as the demo reel. You think about getting that first real on-air position.– You have the confidence to do the job… but now comes the hardest part.

Now you have to find a play-by-play job.

It's no accident that professional sports play-by-play announcers do their jobs as long as they possibly can.– Vin Scully, Milo Hamilton, Ernie Harwell, the late Harry Caray, and the late Jack Buck, among many others, are and were broadcasting games well into their ~~80~~eighties.– Harry Kalas died in the broadcast booth before a Philadelphia Phillies game.– These jobs are precious to those fortunate few who get them, and they're determined to hold onto them as long as they can still do the job.– That also means job mobility at the highest rung is limited.

Obviously, the beginning play-by-play broadcaster isn't concerned about getting a job at the major league level… not yet, anyway.– The hardest job to get is the first job, and that's where a broadcast hopeful needs patience, perseverance, luck, and a plan.

Jon Chelesnik knows all about the job process.– Chelesnik is CEO ~~and founder~~ of Sportscasters Talent Agency of America, a California-based company that ~~was~~he founded in 2005 in partnership with the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association.– STAA is designed to assist beginning play-by-play announcers and sports broadcasters seek and find that elusive first gig.– Chelesnik puts his previous experience ~~of the business~~ into his work.– He was a radio show host for ESPN and Sporting News Radio, and for XTRA-690 radio in San Diego. Chelesnik also did play-by-play for several years with the Arena Football League, the International Basketball League, and TV play-by-play for The Football Network.

Needless to say, Jon Chelesnik knows your pain.

But Chelesnik also knows a thing or two about finding jobs, and he's willing to share some of his thoughts and experiences.

Chelesnik believes the biggest problem most job-seekers have is not properly selling themselves to the rest of the world.

"It's called the job market for a reason," Chelesnik said.– "You've got to market yourself. What are you going to do to differentiate yourself from everybody else who's applying?"

Like any job search, a plan is necessary.– The ~~i~~Internet has made the job-hunting process incredibly easy.– Thousands of jobs can be found with a few clicks.– Job boards and search engines are obvious places to start.– Chelesnik says those are fine sources, but he also advises a couple of old-fashioned approaches.

"A better way to find a job is to network.– Let everybody within your professional network know what you're looking for, so they can help you.

"Another idea is what I call the referred request technique, where you ask somebody who's already in your professional network for their advice about how to get a job.– At the end of that conversation, you ask them for two or three other people they would recommend you have a similar conversation with.– That way, you're going to each new person with the recommendation of somebody they already know.– Usually, by your second or third contact, you're going to find somebody who has a job opening.

"The key is telling each new contact that you're not asking them for a job, but rather, advice about the job market and that takes the pressure off ~~(~~[the contact~~)~~]."

Part of a successful marketing approach, Chelesnik says, is an accurate portrayal of the job hunter.– And an accurate portrayal starts with a simple sheet of paper, also known as a resume. Chelesnik feels a lot of applicants go off the rails from the very start.

"A common mistake young people make in the job market is a misformatted resume," Chelesnik says.– "The first thing that should be on your resume should be your broadcast experience.– Yet, a lot of people put an objective first, which, frankly, is useless and doesn't have

a place on a resume.– Or, they'll put their education first, or their internships.– List your broadcast experience first.

"A second mistake is not customizing the cover letter to the job for which they're applying. One-size-fits-all letters don't work.– They're going to cost you the job.– Instead, you need to research the employer a little bit–; tell them in your opening paragraph why that employer is attractive to you.– Is it their ratings?– Is it the attendance of the baseball team to which you're applying?– Maybe they have record attendance, or maybe it's on-field performance of the team. But you've got to customize the cover letter to the job.– It's a mistake not to."

Once you get the basics of the resume and cover letter solved, the next step is to determine what to include on a demo reel.– No employer is going to hire an on-air talent without listening to samples of your work.– Chelesnik offers several suggestions on how to construct the demo reel.

"You should have an ~~8~~eight- to ~~12~~twelve-minute, uncut sample from each sport you broadcast. You should choose segments that give the time and score within the first ten seconds or so, because that's the first thing an employer is listening for.– A play-by-play reel should also have a pre-game or post-game interview.

Chelesnik has specific ideas about one specific sport.

"The one sport that you need two samples of is baseball.– It's the most difficult sport to call because of all the down time, so those employers tend to want to hear a little bit more before they're convinced you're the right person for the job.– So, for baseball, include two complete half innings; one featuring a little bit of scoring, and the other one … just kind of a long, slow, drawn-out half inning that demonstrates your ability to fill."

As everyone knows, the thrilling, game-winning shot or play is the one most remembered by fans.- So, if you have such a call, you'd put it at the beginning of your demo, right?

Wrong, says Chelesnik.

"When choosing play-by-play segments for your demo, avoid using dramatic, late-game situations.– Anybody can make that sound good, but that's going to be only 3 percent of the broadcasting you do.– Instead, put something that's from the middle of a game, something that's representative of the other 97 percent of your play-by-play."

A solid demo reel sehould also include a condensed version of your on-air work.

"Your play-by-play demo can also include a highlights track," Chelesnik says, "but don't let it exceed 60sixty seconds.– And make sure it includes a sample from each sport that you call.– The reason the highlights track is not as imperative as the longer stuff is because anybody can sound good in 12twelve-second snippets.– You need the long stuff to showcase all of the little things that an employer is looking for in a good play-by-play broadcaster."

Once you've determined the content of the demo reel, do not overlook the packaging of the demo reel.

"Presentation counts!– Make sure your demo reel is constructed properly," Chelesnik advises. "A CD or a DVD that has your name hand-written on it with a Sharpie—that makes a bad impression.– Make sure you take the time to put together a nice presentation of your demo and your resume."

Chelesnik says a prospective employee should also keep simple geography in mind when applying for jobs.

"Most employers prefer to hire regionally when they can, because that person knows more about the local market than an out-of-towner," Chelesnik says.

The job search is fraught with nerves, impatience, waiting, anxiety, and those days that turn into weeks with no word regarding your application.– Should you follow up?– How should you follow up?– Is a phone call acceptable?– What about an email?– Should you do more than that? How often should you inquire about a job without appearing to be a nuisance?

"A huge mistake is to apply for the job and then sit back and wait for the phone to ring," Chelesnik says. "You have to have a follow-up strategy. It's more about who you know than what you know. So if you can get a common acquaintance to put in a good word for you, or even hand deliver your demo and resume to the employer, that's going to help a lot.

"You've got to be politely persistent in keeping your name in front of employers."

Final Thoughts

A play-by-play broadcaster, amateur or professional, should never take the job for granted. It is no accident many long-time team broadcasters have held their positions for many years.

Why?

It's a great gig!

Nearly everyone who has a play-by-play job is grateful to have it; just ask someone who has one. A play-by-play job is something most people would love to do but never get even a remote chance to do. It's also one of those jobs that everyone thinks they can do better than the person doing it. If you are fortunate enough to land a play-by-play job, no matter where it is or what it pays, you should be thankful for the shot. These jobs are tough to get and tougher to keep.

This manual is designed to give future and beginning play-by-play announcers some insight as to how a game broadcast happens. It is hoped that even veteran announcers might be able to utilize some of the information. The play-by-play job is an ever-evolving, ever-changing process.

The best part is that, somewhere, sometime, there will be another game to call.

So … be prepared … and have fun!

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