

ALL-SPORTS RADIO: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRY NICHE

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(Dedicated to the Memory of Larry DeBord)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines an aspect of the relationship between sport and media by developing the evolutionary history of the all-sports radio programming. Consisting predominantly of primary sources, this work traces the emergence of non-play-by-play sports radio by presenting it as part of an evolving radio industry trend that began in the 1950's and resulted in the introduction of tightly bound programming packages designed to attract specific audience types rather than the more traditionally eclectic radio programming approach.

INTRODUCTION

Though the connection between radio and sports has been a strong one throughout the course of the electronic medium's process of development, the more recent shift toward sports radio programming as a collective and focused whole, or *all-sports* radio, marks a radical departure from accepted radio industry practice. The approach to airing sport and sport-related programming has changed dramatically over the last half of the twentieth century, and the resulting idiom seems curiously more adroit and more intent at re-creating itself virtually on a daily basis.

The nature of sports radio is at one time nearly as indefinable as it is recognizable, and it has in effect become a much more powerful medium than many industry observers could have possibly predicted. Its reach and its presence is such that sports radio has evolved into a highly influential force within two spheres, creating within both the radio and sporting industries a separate and most powerful new force with which to consider and contend in the course of each institution's daily practices.

At its core, all-sports radio is a source that presents facts and discussion (and in some cases in conjunction with play-by-play broadcasting) concerning the exploits of the heroes and villains of today's multi-billion dollar sporting industry to an audience often presumed by many to be a cross section of adoring fans and hardened gamers in various markets throughout the country. Combine these elements of sports programming with vaudevillian-derived romps of sophomoric slapstick and scandal mongering, and what results is a highly entertaining and marketable radio style that translates often into ratings success and marketing credibility with an audience demographic construct long ignored by industry programmers. It is in every sense, as one former network owner remarked in 1994, "a no brainer"¹ in terms of its approach and ability to land a targeted audience.

The move toward the all-sports format marks an abrupt break with what had been conventional radio programming practices. It also provides another evolutionary window from which to view the transformation of commercial radio formatting from its early incarnations to the present. Clearly,

sports radio as a formatted genre, and sports talk, the genre's stock in trade, are the result of years of adaptation and the search for wider and more lucrative radio market niches. While the very concepts of all-sport and sports talk radio are indeed products of contemporary times, they are also remnants of older more established radio practices, practices which can be found today in the all-sports programming makeup.

NICHE PROGRAMMING IN RADIO'S EARLY YEARS

Traditionally, sports radio programming had been aired as a means to capitalize on America's growing fascination with the sporting world. While the rich and storied history of radio sports is replete with tales of superhuman achievement depicted by larger-than-life broadcasters, the reality of sports broadcasting during radio's earliest developmental years was that its overall audience appeal and prognosis for future success were constantly in jeopardy. In the opening chapters of his Voices of the Game,² author Curt Smith sought to clear up many of the preconceived notions regarding the earliest days of baseball broadcasting and the ability of radio executives to maintain anything close to a lucrative and stable broadcast existence. He reports that while the financial interests of team owners and station managers continued to clash, the plausibility, not to mention the culpability, of airing sports programming was hampered considerably by avarice, ego, and a significant lack of on-site technology. In the economic judgment of programmers, who often took their cues from the era's moral watchdogs, sport just did not have enough mass appeal to warrant more attention and air time than it already enjoyed, and some went so far as to suggest that it was receiving too much air play without the requisite profitability as it was.

The thought that sport enjoyed too much focus was steeped in then-current industry approaches toward the broadcast day and is less a reflection of the nation's perception and evolving preoccupation with sport. In an effort to build credibility with its audience, early station managers and operators were convinced that they had to be able to provide a variety of programming for a diversity of listeners while maintaining some semblance of respect for things of a more *proper* nature.³ Certainly one could never hope to justify a full slate of sports programming given those terms, regardless of the ratings such programming might expect. Still, and inherent conflicts notwithstanding, sport would go on to enjoy a position of relative prominence during the earliest days of the medium, but its appeal can only be viewed as one of the more commercially successful supplementary programming features and not the single driving factor behind the medium's success.

Throughout early junctures in radio's development, the idea of a singular programming practice was unfathomable, and neither sports nor any other programming type could hope to claim anything close to broadcast exclusivity. Early programming was approached on a *catch as catch can* basis. Management was forced into a process of creating programming based solely on the availability of a variety of different types of entertainment types and product advertisers, and often it was the advertisers who found themselves in the enviable position of dictating programming terms and content to station management. The modern ideal toward programming that fulfills a particular marketing de-

mands, or niche formatting, was unthinkable given these standards.⁴

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ALL-SPORTS FORMAT

The origins of the all-sports format are to be found within the evolutionary histories of traditional sports play-by-play and the more recently evolved trend toward the coalescence of news and talk formats. Certainly, its connection to play-by-play is an obvious one, though ironically, all-sports by its definition does not have to include play-by-play as part of its normal programming functions. Rather, it is this physical—some might add spiritual—connection to the talk hybrid that presents such an intriguing picture of the development of all-sports programming.

Paralleling radio's search for security through formatting was sport's continued rise through the ranks as both supplementary programming and national preoccupation. With each successive decade of the twentieth century, sport, and especially baseball, was becoming more ingrained as pastime and constructed as part of an overall model that many hoped would continue to define the notion of *the ideal American*.⁵ Baseball, America's oldest professionally played team sport, was as popular with working class Americans as well as elites, and it enjoyed remarkably positive coverage and presented as America's pastime, its passion, and its most revered national export.⁶ As politicians, religious figures, educators, and celebrities from all fields sought to position themselves as *pro-baseball* and subsequently *pro-sport*, many Americans had come to identify themselves first as citizens and finally as fans. In the consciousness of many Americans, sports and nationalism were made up of the same processes, and media moguls set themselves up to capitalize on the growing *sport-as-American-birthright* sentiment.⁷

By the 1950s, sporting events were appearing more regularly on television as well as on radio. Legendary radio play-by-play voices, such as Red Barber, Mel Allen, and the revered Dizzy Dean, were by now broadcasting in both mediums, often times during the course of the same broadcast. Whole networks were appearing solely for the purpose of broadcasting play-by-play, and as recently as the mid-1950s, it was not unusual for two or three different radio concerns to be broadcasting the same contests, each attempting to out duel the other by assigning the finest available broadcast teams to work the games.⁸

With love of sport considered by both moralists and elites to be tantamount to love of country, and especially during early Cold War muscle-flexing, advertisers were eager to have their products associated with the wholesome images of sport, and clearly one way to do so was through continued sponsorship of aired events.⁹ In fact, whole broadcasting packages were organized prior to an upcoming season by advertising executives and radio management featuring such specifically male-oriented products as beer, cigarettes, cars, and shaving cream. While the ratings for sports programming were often very acceptable, if not excellent, the sponsors were happy with the increases in sales and overall visibility with the consumers.¹⁰

ENTER NEW YORK CITY AND SPORTS TALK

The fact that throughout the decade of the 1950's at least one New York team would appear in each of baseball's World Series, with each of the three clubs winning at least one during this streak, further served as an enormous boost to the industry's local appeal and subsequent future nationwide possibilities. New York's market is revered in the industry as the number one media market in the country, and when a particular media genre or sub-genre does well there, it is the mark of future successes elsewhere. With the onslaught of broadcast sports came the belief that sports programming was ripe for further exploitation, and the success through experimentation with a variety of pre- and post-game programming styles lent legitimacy to these assumptions. One of these programming ideas to come to the attention of many in radio management would be a variation of the newly evolved *talkshow* discussion format that would focus solely on issues in the American sports landscape.¹¹

The idea that on-air discussions about sport could survive the rather formal radio broadcasting setting without the backdrop of play-by-play analysis would on the surface appear rather ludicrous given radio's traditional programming approaches. More to the point, up to and during the early 1950's, it simply was not done. New York, however, presented programmers with the one market where it may have been possible. With so many different teams in a variety of sports and such a pronounced media apparatus at the ready, the concept of sports and conversation for many New Yorkers was a fairly commonplace occurrence. While the on-going sports debates were generally the domain of the playgrounds or local bars, the appearance of the usual degree of "Mantle versus Mays", "Dodgers versus Giants", "Yankees versus the rest of the world"-type debates provided a marked degree of local commonality.¹² Of course, the key to success was to bring this degree of partisan fanaticism to the airwaves and present it to the fan/listener as both informative and interesting radio.

During the early 1950's, enterprising sports programmers and producers aired programming that could in part be identified as sports talk, but up to this point, there had been no indication that these were anything more integral than spot programming or time fillers during rain delays or some other unforeseen interruption of regularly scheduled programming.¹³ What is known is that the earliest sports talk programs made use of the round-table format, a style in evidence to some degree in contemporary radio but clearly regarded as a rather antiquated practice by younger generations of sports radio programmers today. Programming was never interactive, and though celebrity guests were aired when available, just as with earlier incarnations of so-called general talk, the shows were generally dominated by a host in monologue. Still, nothing in terms of regularly scheduled sport talk was in existence.¹⁴

The late Stan Martyn, a long time sports voice and programmer for NBC sports and later WFAN, New York, was rising among the ranks of New York broadcast circles in the 1950's, and he recalled in a series of interviews in 1994 and 1995 that the first sports talk show to become a regularly aired feature was a round-table discussion hosted by the versatile and highly influential New York play-by-play voice Marty Glickman, writer Bert Lee, and a rather obscure broadcaster named Ward Wilson

during the summer of 1955. Their program, which aired on WHN, New York, the 1050 AM flagship¹⁵ of the Brooklyn Dodgers Radio Network, became a regular pre- and post-game feature throughout that particular baseball season. They were often joined by the glamorous and controversial women's tennis star Gussie Moran, who was then riding a wave of publicity caused by her then-curiously practice of playing in outfits that "proudly displayed her frilly undergarments".¹⁶

This trio, or sometime quartet, did not air calls, as was still the custom in most talk settings. Rather, they debated the issues of the day in the sports world in a more conventional roundtable format with an expected focus on baseball, which during the 1950's, and as previously noted, was of particular interest to many New Yorkers. The conversation itself reportedly bordered on the banal, but for the partisan New Yorkers, it was curious and new and probably very exciting to hear in terms of its novelty. But from a programming standpoint, what ultimately served the show best was its ability to provide the fans with up-to-the-minute sports news of note and the occasional appearance of local celebrities as guests on the program. Equally as important was the lure caused by the juxtaposition of Glickman,¹⁷ a steadfast Giant fan, caught between the Dodger-rooting duo of Lee and Wilson. According to Martyn, fans of both teams were drawn to the program due in part to "the inevitable bickering and *cheap shots*" likely to come about as the result of what must have appeared to partisan New Yorkers as a most unholy trinity. Nevertheless, the modest local acclaim indicated to local programmers in America's largest market that there was indeed a place for this sort of programming, rendering the WHN experiment a precursor to what will later come to be recognized as sports talk radio.¹⁸

INTERACTIVE SPORTS TALK

By the early 1960's, sports talk programming in a variety of formats ranging from individual commentary to roundtable discussion was beginning to appear in major markets around the country. While they remained conspicuously tied to the play-by-play broadcast schedule, some of the shows began to take on their own style and certainly their own character, though they tended to remain steeped in the more traditional partisanship. The majority of these programs continued to air on area flagships, rendering the notion of local team criticism effectively moot. Certainly by this stage in the relationship between sports and radio, the degree to which each understood the financial stakes could temper most disputes, but it was always the team that maintained the upper hand. Too much criticism aimed at team management could prove disastrous to stations as teams were notorious for their manipulation of the media and understood that access to players and breaking news separated the top broadcasting companies enjoying a line of prospective advertisers from those on the brink. As a result, they tended to be careful to air hosts, announcers, and now callers who were not viewed as being overly critical toward their teams for fear of losing team patronage.¹⁹

Generally, sports talk programming was aired in an evening time slot, usually following the afternoon drive,²⁰ and either before or after the evening's play-by-play.²¹ In the case where no games were forthcoming, shows were aired in specific time slots that usually ranged from either six to ten or seven to eleven.²² As for the move to interactive caller-based programming, those details remain

sketchy, though it is likely that with general talk experiencing ratings success through call-ins, sports talk would easily adapt and progress toward a similar technique.

As would be expected, New York led the way into the future of sports talk. With its year round deluge of sports activity, New York presented the fledgling genre with a perfect setting from which to develop as a medium. There seemed to be a constant and renewable source of discussion fodder in sports in New York City ranging from football to basketball and baseball to hockey, and this list could include teams from both the college and professional ranks, and by 1964 there were at least three sport talk programs airing there regularly.²³

The first sports talk host in New York to air callers was Art Rust, Jr., who in 1960 broadcast over tiny 5,000 watt WMCA radio. Though his tenure is important in terms of the chronology of the genre, he was deemed boring and uninteresting by listeners, and station management would replace him a number of times before settling on a more colorful and appealing talent named John Sterling in 1970.²⁴

Sterling's show was by far the most popular local sports talk show in New York. While his legitimacy as a New York sports authority today stems from his role as the Yankees' principal play-by-play voice since 1989, he actually built his reputation as a wisecracking and uncompromising popular talk show host in the 1970's. Sterling would combine subject knowledge with a unique brand of sarcasm, though he lacked the general nastiness or hard edge of others that would come to signify the genre in later decades. Nevertheless, Sterling came across as something of an on-air bully who made it obvious to listeners or callers both that they had better steer clear of his wrath or risk bearing the brunt of a night's radio mayhem.

Certainly, this on-air persona was part of a carefully crafted technique engineered by all involved, but it was extremely effective. Jim Memelo, a sports talk host at all-sports WSCR in Chicago, grew up in New York as a regular listener to Sterling's evening talk show, and according to him, Sterling brought confrontation to a genre normally the domain of traditional chatters:

Anybody who called up to discuss a trade or bring up a potential trade he would call an idiot. He just ripped callers, and people would have fun listening to him rip callers. [To be ripped by Sterling] was a badge of honor [but] of all the things he's ever done in his career, the best thing he's ever done is being a talk host. Sterling had a cult following, and I was part of it.²⁵

In an age in which sports talk hosts were expected to maintain their poise and a marked degree of decorum and simply chat with callers in order that they not to embarrass the station and, subsequently, the station's teams, Sterling had brought entertainment value to what was at the time inherently (and admittedly) dull programming.

The concept of what programmers call *good radio* comes in to play here. By definition so-called good radio is defined as anything that elicits commentary from the other side of the radio dial. That could mean controversy, vulgarity, breaking news, or something similar that encourages audi-

ences to tune in and remain tuned in long enough for advertisers to justify their expenses. Sterling's style, though certainly antiquated by succeeding generations that would continue to push the envelope of FCC standards, not to mention taste and decorum, was certainly something that was considered in its day to constitute good radio. He had become the type of radio host who warranted further scrutiny every time he was on the air, and, as Memelo echoes, his appeal was widespread and his fan base was notably loyal if not slightly voyeuristic. Still, Sterling's arrival in the early 1970's can also be seen as the culmination of a prior decade's worth of development in the sphere of sport talk.

Other hosts in different markets around the country were too becoming recognized for their contributions to the genre, and by 1965, every market with a major sports franchise was airing sports talk programming regularly. A wide-range of personalities and celebrities from all corners of the sports world were entering into the new format, adding their own insights and opinions for their listeners while providing advertisers newer and larger audiences. Knowledgeable yet soft-spoken Ken Beatrice was beginning his successful thirty plus year reign at WMAL, Washington, D.C. while Jim Healy had begun sports talk at all-talk pioneer KABC, Los Angeles, "sparking excitement and controversy", which was how station promos described it.²⁶ Still, the medium lacked a real distinguishable presence to help it continue its market gains and further legitimize its role as an industry success. Sterling would indeed make inroads to this effect, but he was not the figure that the industry would embrace as its primary spokesman. That spot would be reserved for the most enigmatic and erratic host sports talk had ever seen, Cleveland's Pete Franklin.²⁷

PETE FRANKLIN'S *SPORTSLINE*

During the mid-1960s, and following a decade of moving among markets ranging from McComb, Mississippi, to Bakersfield, California, a Boston born and raised general talk show host named Pete Franklin arrived in Canton, Ohio. Trained as a radio journalist, Franklin's true interest in the field was sports, though during the early part of his career he developed into a fairly marketable talk host. Sport was his element, however, and while he would take calls on sports if the topic came up, a practice that most general talk programmers strictly prohibited, he had yet to display the depths of his talents until he arrived in Canton. As he noted in his aptly titled autobiography, *You Could Argue but You'd Be Wrong*:

My ambition was to get somewhere and take the talk-show format and make it strictly a sports talk show. For years I did straight talk shows—interviewing celebrities, politicians, and authors. But my love was always sports and performing, and the sports talk show was the marriage of both of those.²⁸

By 1967, Franklin had moved north to the larger Cleveland market where he logged the first incarnation of *Sportslines* his three-, sometimes four-hour, sports talk show, which featured call-ins,

updates, and commentary. It must also be noted that while he was finally experiencing success in his chosen genre, he was also following those three or four hours with four and five hour overnight shifts of general talk programming as well. According to one of his many former producers, it was both an exhilarating and exhausting time for Franklin, and even at a relatively young age, he was developing a reputation within the industry and with his listeners as being well prepared, vastly overworked, and seemingly on the verge of what listeners and even a few concerned members of management felt to be a total physical and psychological breakdown.²⁹

Franklin's arrival in Cleveland, initially at tiny 15,000 WERE and ultimately in 1970 at 50,000 watt giant WWWE (3WE), which reached thirty-eight states, Mexico, and on some nights portions of the Caribbean, marked a watershed for both his career as well as the future success of the sports talk industry. Once 3WE changed its format to news/talk programming, they were able to lure the local baseball and basketball franchises and unleashed Franklin on the country during evening slots, and by 1975, Franklin had become a sports talk institution, a phenomenon turned traveling sideshow. And as his ratings continued to soar, other markets around the country began searching for their own *Pete Franklins* to cultivate.

Though insiders and friends of Franklin have steadfastly maintained that his style of abrasive to the point of condescending sports talk programming was completely original and strayed rarely beyond the confines of his genuine personality, others have argued that the foundations of Franklin's routine appear remarkably similar to a legendary (and perhaps apocryphal) figure in West Coast broadcasting named Joe Pyne. Pyne was both a pioneer and a blueprint for a fledgling talk industry in the 1950s and 1960s, a remarkably influential broadcaster who subsequently unleashed a generation of screamers and publicity hounds over the airwaves while helping to solidify talk radio as a formidable broadcast genre. In a career cut short by illness and an unwillingness to compromise with management types, Pyne's stature as a man who in many ways changed the nature of broadcast standards remains legendary in the broadcast community. Still, as difficult as he was to deal with off the air, he seemed veritably out of control on it, which is what brought him to the attention of all-talk radio pioneer KABC, Los Angeles who thought him to be a perfect fit in a format that lacked color.³⁰

Pyne arrived at all-news/all-talk radio pioneer KABC, Los Angeles in 1962 after having spent his earliest professional years of the 1950's in Canada as a radio commentator in any number of different places. An ex-marine—he had reportedly lost a leg to gangrene during WWII—his tough guy image was echoed throughout the course of his broadcasting career. He was both aggressive and obnoxious with callers, but contrary to the standard period perception, his listeners and callers seemed to adore him, suppositions backed by his strong ratings. Evolving from an era in which host and caller were expected to chat politely and part amicably, Pyne refused such politesse. He would bait callers into shouting matches, cause others to stammer and stutter their way through a heated segment, and once the caller was on the defensive, he would publicly berate him as, presumably, only an ex-marine could. Variations of many of his pet phrases even appear today in the arsenals of contemporary talk radio hosts. Joel Spivak, a former co-worker of Pyne's at KLAC Los Angeles, recalled about the man in his

prime:

He was a master showman. He created a sensation and [he] talked a language people understand...It was like professional wrestling. People just loved to hear Pyne do battle. He would lacerate people, but he was funny...One of those comes along once or twice in a lifetime. He was way ahead of his time.³¹

One-time KABC president and general manager George Green was a member of station management during its transformation from eclectic to the highly regimented and focused all-talk format, and he remembers the initial reaction to Pyne's on-air persona by both listeners and management:

He'd tell callers to "go gargle with razor blades," or "I'll put my thumb in your head and use it for a bowling ball," or something like that. All those crazy things. He would hang up on people and talk sarcastically to them, and the public liked it. He had an acid tongue, and it caught on, and he was very popular [pulling] huge ratings at night, nine to twelve, but he was tough to manage. He was so difficult to manage that we literally had to suspend him without pay. And after awhile, all we could do was have him come to work, punch in, and sit in a conference room while someone else did his show.³²

Pyne would last only two years at KABC, eventually moving on to rival station KLAC and then to local television before fading into broadcast lore, but his role as an industry pioneer was cemented during that brief stint at KABC. He had brought together virtually every element of broadcast technique into one setting. He could appear knowledgeable, had a flair for the spectacular, and listeners found themselves tuning in just to hear whatever outrageous utterances he might posit on a given evening. Before Pyne, the concept of debate, of radio controversy, was limited to the occasional outburst, but in the soon-to-be *post*-Pyne era, radio would be transformed by talkshow hosts well versed in the art of manufacturing controversy and controlled discontent. As Spivak pointed out:

Because of Pyne's success, we presumed the way to get audience response was to say the most outrageous things you could on-air to make people angry, shock them, or startle them. Whether or not your remarks made any sense was irrelevant.³³

Structurally an argument could be waged that Franklin may have built his persona in part on Pyne's style, one with which he certainly would be familiar given Franklin's tenure in Bakersfield and Pyne's West Coast television exposure after he had worn out his welcome on the radio airwaves. Franklin, like Pyne, could be equally loud and uncompromising, irrational at times, and completely out-of-con-

trol at others, though the act belied a sharp wit and an awareness of the standards of good radio. Sports, probably as much or even more so than general or political talk, is the domain of the highly subjective, highly personal and volatile partisan identity, and, thus, a fan being subjected to a negative barrage concerning his favorite team or player could easily be transformed into the type of controversy that an experienced host could perpetuate for days. To hear it from a self-proclaimed “obnoxious loudmouth” such as Pete Franklin, who actually was presented in those exact words in station promotional recordings, must have seemed next to excruciating, and like other controversial hosts, even his harshest critics would tune in regularly just to see how offensive he could be.³⁴ Reminiscing on these early days, one of Franklin’s many former producers offered:

He transcended sports talk to the point where [*sic*] if you knew something about sports—if you had any interest in sports whatsoever—you would listen enough to give him some serious ratings. You will be absolutely amazed at the listenership this guy had!³⁵

Driving the frenzy around Franklin’s reign in the Cleveland market of the late 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s was that these years are referred to locally (and nationally) as the darkest days of the city’s long and storied sports legacy. Each of the area’s professional sports franchises had hit upon woefully difficult times, and Franklin masterfully played upon the fans’ discontent. Local area writers and other industry insiders were convinced that Franklin was whipping Cleveland fans into a frenzy of anger and non-support with some even crediting him for nearly toppling and ultimately forcing the sale of Cleveland’s National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise, the Cavaliers, from its controversial and seemingly inept former owner Ted Stepien who Franklin harassed and criticized relentlessly. This in turn gave him even further legitimacy as a knowledgeable host and a fiery personality as well as someone who had the power to affect change and controversy from behind his microphone, all of which translated into remarkable ratings and audience shares in a medium not yet familiar with that degree of success. According to former producer David George, Franklin orchestrated this barrage of anti-team rhetoric nightly on his show. He notes, “You’ve always got to set up a straw man, and Pete was very good at doing that. He also had the benefit of having a lot of straw men at the time, so it was a really good time for controversy.”³⁶

Ultimately, Franklin’s legacy goes beyond his unique personality quirks. Franklin demonstrated an unparalleled understanding of the use of various production techniques and programming hooks. If Pyne took exception to a caller by verbally berating him, Franklin took the more technological step by pioneering the use of actualities, recorded sound bytes generally lifted from film or television that are then “dropped” into programming at convenient spots in order to make his point, presenting a unique contrast to his adaptation of Pyne in sports talk. Pyne’s spoken insults, though also meant to provoke and offend, were, nonetheless, very personal responses. Franklin, however, could take Pyne’s style a step farther by effectively demonstrating a complete disregard for many of his callers by not even bothering to end the conversation with his own words. By using taped messages and other

sound devices, such as the infamous Archie Bunker “meathead” speech,³⁷ he could, in a sense, turn his back on callers he wished to discard and not have to bother even acknowledging their presence before unceremoniously “dumping”³⁸ them. Of course, this practice translated well in the ratings by building still further interest in Franklin’s highly theatrical, audience-baiting antics simply because a listener wanted to hear what Franklin might do next. Furthermore, with a seemingly endless array of pre-recorded responses at his disposal, he could “dump” caller after caller and rarely run out of this sort of theatrical material, while further playing to audience expectations.

Another of Franklin’s pioneering influences was the daily menu, a parameter of eligible daily topics which he would designate at the beginning of each new hour of programming and likely learned during his years in general talk. Deviations would not be tolerated unless of course some late-breaking story of note was developing, but what it created among his callers was the idea that they would not have their calls aired if they simply wanted to waste Franklin’s time with juvenile and uninteresting partisanship. As potential “co-hosts”, which in a sense is what callers are in interactive programming, Franklin’s callers were expected to bring something either unique or at the least entertaining to the program, which meant either insight or a willingness to be set-up.³⁹

General talk too utilized the menu approach, but in such a subjective, vast, and decidedly anti-intellectual genre as sport, too often a caller will get through to the host without anything of substance to add to the program. On a particularly good programming evening, this could prove a terrible blow to the show’s continuity, flow and overall appeal, and as every industry host or producer will acknowledge, one bad call in the midst of a good segment can bring that segment to a screeching halt. Franklin, irascible, hot-tempered, and well aware of his industry reputation, would have none of it, and callers were made well aware of their responsibilities prior to their being aired, which also placed a great deal of pressure on his staff of programmers, call-screeners, and producers who all found him to be as erratic off the air as he was on it.

Another industry technique Franklin employed was the cultivation of regular callers who could be identified by creative albeit innocuous nicknames such as *The Swami*, *Philly Joe*, and the importunate *Mr. Know-It-All*, who was in actuality Mike Trivissano, a long-time listener who remarkably would take over 3WE’s *Sportsline* in 1987 after Franklin left for New York’s WFAN. Nonetheless, this too was a calculated attempt to build interest, especially in the case of listeners who often looked forward to the usual nightly cast of characters with their colorful names and habits. Franklin used this cast of regulars as foils, bouncing ideas and insults off them while he kept alive variations of old arguments that remained effective ratings boosters, especially in local markets.⁴⁰

Though he was by the mid-1970’s a fixture in sports programming, both locally as well as nationally due to 3WE’s extraordinary nighttime reach, Franklin was not always well-received by his contemporaries. Many found him arrogant and disrespectful and derided his style, much in the same way that Pyne’s contemporaries would find him garish and beyond the pale.⁴¹ Yet, the late 1960s and the 1970s were periods of such marked social transformation that change was being affected in all social institutions. Franklin’s ability to transcend the accepted methodology of the sports talk host, to

bring entertainment to the sports industry, which in itself was a matter of entertainment, brought the industry out of the narrow confines of hard-core sport circles and to a broader audience that would be titillated and not necessarily offended by his antics while they learned what was happening on area and national playing fields. Those that spoke out against him in many ways were usually less successful, and their criticisms often belied a degree of awe and jealousy. When asked about this typical response from Franklin contemporaries, Dave Dombrowski, a producer of *Sportsline* from 1981-1986, Franklin's last years in Cleveland, became enraged:

I think Pete was a master at both ends [sports and entertainment]. Having worked with him and a number of other people, I don't care what [other industry personnel] say. There wasn't anybody who knew more about the world of sports at the time than Pete, nor was there anybody who knew how to make a show work. I haven't heard anyone like him since.⁴²

By 1987 Franklin had left Cleveland for New York City, what he deemed "the palace." He had hoped to reach a wider audience with a greater range of topics at his disposal, but within months of his New York tenure Franklin, who was grossly overweight and aging rapidly, suffered a massive heart attack, leaving his career in jeopardy. He finally did recover and wound up back on the West Coast, reviving his call-in format at San Francisco's all-sports KNBR in the early 1990s.⁴³

WFAN AND ALL-SPORTS

The foundations laid during the 1960s and 1970s grew into a massive enterprise by the 1980's as sports talk became both an acknowledged force in the world of sports radio programming and a genuine ratings giant. The contributions of Pete Franklin and John Sterling, as well as some of the less volatile hosts, helped bring sports talk to a level concurrent with general talk in terms of its popular appeal, and along with news programming they managed to lead the way for the revival of the AM radio band. The common thinking of the period was that AM's only chance for continued survival was to steer clear of the competition through music formatting with FM while cultivating the talk, news, and sports angles as its personal domain.

With the proliferation of sports talk no longer a matter of speculation, some began to see a correlation between the success of all-talk and the next frontier in sports broadcasting. The questions remained as to just how much of an audience share an all-sports format could maintain in order to keep a station on the air long enough to foster a reputation. Again, it was New York that would serve as the testing grounds, and the result was a hybrid approach to programming steeped in the tradition of sports talk styles and surrounded by a vast array of sports news, celebrity guests, feature stories, and entertaining sketches. It became known as all-sports radio.

The first all-sports station, WFAN in New York, was founded by Emmis Broadcasting chairman Jeff Smulyen in July 1987.⁴⁴ Immediately it came under the intense scrutiny of the broadcast

industry as a disaster in the making. George Green, then president and general manager at KABC, which pioneered the all-talk format in 1960, reported that in his initial reactions, he was as skeptical as those of other industry insiders following the revelation that KABC was initiating all-talk in 1960. As he recalled, his first words to Smulyen included an emphatic “Don’t do it!” Green had multiple concerns regarding the potential for success of such a narrow format with such a potentially narrow audience pool. As he recalled, “I didn’t think he could make it because it was a male appeal format. How can you get any numbers without appealing to women?”⁴⁵

To Green’s credit, he was absolutely correct in his original assessment. As Michael Lev of the *New York Times* reported on 12 November 1990, WFAN’s first year losses alone totaled between seven million and eight million dollars, and, accordingly, WFAN nearly folded a number of times in that first year. Following that disastrous first year, however, Smulyen sought to alleviate some of the pressure by seeking a more desirable broadcasting frequency, and he bought WNBC, which at 660 AM would provide WFAN a wider broadcast range. Along with this purchase, he secured the rights to broadcast both the National Basketball Association (NBA) Knicks and the National Hockey League (NHL) Rangers, adding some much needed legitimacy to the station as well as providing them some programming diversity. Still, the most important aspect of the purchase of WNBC involved something totally unrelated to sports. What ultimately saved WFAN following that disastrous first year, however, was the addition of general talk star and radio personality Don Imus as their morning drive host.⁴⁶

During WFAN’s first year, Greg Gumbel, the highly respected veteran radio and television sports broadcaster, was WFAN’s original morning drive time host, but in the words of one station insider, Gumbel “died a horrible radio death”.⁴⁷ His affable, informative style of broadcasting was no match for New York City’s vast array of “shock jocks”, “rockers”, and “screamers”, and management had little choice but to seek to replace him with a more explosive talent, a bill for which Imus was perfectly suited.

According to WFAN’s own literature, “Imus built his legendary career reveling in the agony of others.”⁴⁸ More to the point, Imus’ morning show at WNBC was pulling in huge numbers in the nation’s number one market, but he was not a sports host by any stretch of the imagination. The irony of this remarkable turn of events is that as Imus became the station’s saving grace, it totally negated the definition of all-sports as designed by Smulyen and his staff. Yet, it is due in no small part to Imus’ immense popularity that WFAN, and subsequently all-sports, was able to come to the forefront as an industry success.⁴⁹ According to Michael Lev of the *New York Times* on 12 November 1990, by the end of Imus’ second year at WFAN, they had gone from their massive deficit to a reported profit of twenty-four million dollars. Imus’ success at WFAN gave all-sports the necessary ratings boost that convinced others in the industry that on a market-to-market basis, all-sports could both survive and thrive.

While WFAN was the first to succeed in the genre, the prototypical all-sports station in terms of design and implementation of the format was actually Philadelphia’s WIP. It operated by a scaled-down approach to sports call-in programming with little or no deviations, shunning both play-by-play

and guest appearances. Its programmer, Tom Bigby, who also serves as an all-sports programming consultant nationwide, designed WIP strictly as a call-in service only. For Bigby and his industry disciples, all-sports is about “the male bonding business,” about combining sports talk with male-oriented and even risqué, sports and entertainment industry conversation including such staples as polls in which callers and hosts rate schools for the appeal of their cheerleaders or debates regarding the sex appeal of athletes on, for example, the women’s pro tennis and beach volleyball tours.⁵⁰

While this approach to content certainly parallels that of WFAN, it is enacted without the double-edge ratings boosts of a Don Imus-type personality or the added appeal of play-by-play. According to Bigby, the approach WIP takes to sports programming is steeped in the broadcast traditions of classic rock programming. The station’s broadcasts are layered with various “hot”-sounding elements and backed by hard-driving music to help build excitement for each successive segment. As Bigby reminisces, “We really run this thing like a 1970s Top 40 radio station with the bells and whistles, with the jingles, the noise because that’s what makes our audience very comfortable.”⁵¹ Moreover, and as Bigby is quick to point out, this effect lends an air of nostalgia to the broadcasts because most of the listeners of the targeted demographic of males twenty-five to fifty-four years of age come to all-sports from classic rock. Bigby even schedules commercials in spots similar to those in traditional music programming in order to maintain the effect of FM style in an AM environment.⁵²

Though all-sports has survived early scares and countless crises over the past decade, it has been able to secure a spot for itself as a genuine industry niche. To be sure, there are some markets for which all-sports is more suited, and clearly what works in Philadelphia may fail miserably in Detroit. Yet, the fact that all-sports has survived this long without an accepted plan or much more notable and widespread success all the while allowing their sponsors the opportunity to offer their targeted demographic a variety of male-oriented consumer goods speaks volumes about its durability in the radio marketplace.⁵³

THE ALL-SPORT NETWORKS

The next step in the evolution of all-sports radio appears in the form of the nationwide syndicated network broadcast. Throughout its brief history, sports talk has been the domain of local partisan appeal, generating interest in local teams through a constant barrage of on-air conversations that serve symbiotically to aid the causes of the local franchises, the local stations, and local advertisers. Certainly Franklin’s reputation was aided in part by 3WE’s reach, and Smulyen’s decision to move WFAN down the dial to the more powerful 660 range did allow for more of a syndicated type of environment, but the broadcasts remained locally focused in spite of the increasing listenership. The thought of actually going nationwide, of extending the focus through a broad-based syndication, appeared to many to be an exercise in futility, and as would be expected, the earliest attempts at airing nationwide all-sports programming resulted in miserable failures.

In 1980, Connecticut’s Scott Rasmussen, whose father William founded cable television’s first all-sports network, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) in Bristol, became

the first to attempt to air twenty-four hour sports radio programming on his Enterprise Radio Network. A valiant effort against seemingly insurmountable odds, it was forced fold due to a “lack of listeners, advertisers, and station clearance” within its first six months.⁵⁴

Another early attempt to air national sports talk programming would not occur for another eight years when the RTV network began broadcasting evenings from its studios in suburban Boston. Though it too was a short lived venture, RTV, nonetheless, sparked enormous interest in broadcasting circles by presenting air talent with the notion that there was a future job market for such programming. Many respected hosts, including John Sterling, and industry “comers”, such as Jim Memelo, hired on at RTV, whose downfall, it would appear, was more self-inflicted than industry-related.

According to Memelo, the RTV founder and president—he steadfastly refused to identify him—had devised a plan whereby RTV was only available on specially patented satellite dishes, which were owned and marketed exclusively by the RTV. Without enough station clearances to convince advertisers to sign on, the network was able to stay in business for the eight months it aired only by virtue of the profits made from the satellite sales and subsequent airtime leases. However, as Memelo recalls, RTV was devised as part of a much grander programming scheme, market failures notwithstanding:

...it was a disaster. The guy had a good idea, but he was a crook. Friends who I knew were *stringing*⁵⁵ for them got stiffed. I mean, we were all excited because they were hiring people, but a lot of us were left out there floating without a paycheck. The first week I didn't get a paycheck, I shipped a tape and a resume to WFAN, got a gig, and said, “Bye guys!” However, every idea that he came up with—call-ins, overnight service, small market targets—came to fruition for somebody else.⁵⁶

In 1989 a Las Vegas country music radio station owner named Jerry Kutner heard WIP's Tom Bigby speak of the possibilities of a no-frills approach to all-sports and sought out Bigby's counsel, resulting in the launch of the Sports and Entertainment Network (SEN). SEN was by and large a network version of WIP with the exception of the wider focus brought about through the diversity of caller locales and interests. The parameters were similar to WIP in that calls would be relegated to the four major sports—baseball, football, basketball, and hockey—with the occasional seasonal appeal of golf and tennis, horse and auto racing. Still, the network's major focus revolved around the more traditionally appealing male-oriented sport focus.⁵⁷

Where SEN differed from other attempts, however, was in its location targets. Through Bigby's counsel, Kutner devised a system whereby they conceded the larger markets to local broadcasting companies, focusing instead on the medium and smaller markets that had often been ignored by contemporary sports radio. Instead of becoming household names in larger markets with major league franchises such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, SEN hosts were gaining listeners in smaller markets such as Scranton-Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania; Macon, Georgia; and Saginaw, Michigan. Yet, it did serve a niche, and as a result, SEN became the first all-sports network to survive its first year and

subsequently beyond. It was also the first network to attempt twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week interactive sports radio programming without the fallback of play-by-play.

SEN continued to grow in prominence in its tiny studios just off Las Vegas' strip until it was bought out in 1994 by One-On-One Sports, a Chicago broadcasting concern whose original focus was low signal broadcasts of area golf tournaments. Once in Chicago, One-On-One grew even more rapidly, aided in part by their successful campaign to win the North American broadcast rights to the 1994 World Cup Soccer tournament. Following that, they broadened their focus by concentrating on entering into markets normally beyond their reach, moving into New York and Los Angeles as well as Boston and finally locally in Chicago by 1998, though they continued to find their greatest successes in the smaller markets much as they had in the SEN days.⁵⁸

Other early players in the syndicated sports talk industry included the "sister" station to SEN, the American Sports Radio Network (ASRN), also out of Las Vegas. ASRN was founded by Kutner's former financial partner Richard Grissar, who, following a dispute, lured nearly half of SEN's air and studio talent to his new facility across town in 1992. Basically run along the same broadcast principles as SEN, cash flow and clearance difficulties forced ASRN to venture into syndicating more play-by-play programming by 1994, but by 1996 they ceased operations completely.

The TEAM, syndicated sports talk programming from WTEM, Washington D.C., and the Sports Fan Network, also out of Las Vegas, were, like ASRN and SEN/One-On-One before them, making some strides in the syndicated sport talk marketplace, but unlike One-On-One, they never able to fully establish themselves as players independent of major network backing.

Another syndicated sports talk show that did find a modicum of success nationally featured the steady and unflappable Ron Barr, a chat-type host whose *Sports Byline, USA* aired weeknights from San Francisco, which made it a perfect fit for overnights in the Midwest and along the Eastern Seaboard. According to industry observers, Barr's programming was indeed popular and predictable, if not spectacular, but he was thought to lack the vitality upon which sports programming thrives. As one veteran producer noted:

Ron Barr is convenient. He'll *smooze* you. You'll never get any calls from people complaining about him, and if you're on the East Coast and you're a program director, you plug into Ron Barr at ten and you've got no worries. He's not in there because he's the best. He's there because he's so user friendly.⁵⁹

The most common all-sports industry complaint, however, is that it lacks a true star who can be considered both a focus and a blueprint for future success, much in the way that Rush Limbaugh has taken the political talk format to greater heights. Though Franklin and Sterling were remarkably influential and enjoyed some national exposure, they were never regarded on the same level that some of the others in the general or political talk field have been. The media explosions of Imus, Limbaugh, and the borderline obscene Howard Stern, who has clearly pushed the envelope when it comes to sopho-

moric radio antics, highlight this glaring deficiency in all-sports as many industry observers see it. As David George explains:

As a former program director and someone who worked in the format for a long time, my gut feeling is that you don't have a premier syndicated sports talk show. [Ron Barr] hasn't reinvented the wheel; he's not a craze. He's filling a void, but when you compare Ron Barr to a Limbaugh, to a Stern, or even an Imus, you begin to see where a nationally syndicated show really can have an impact. I think you have to ask yourself whether it is because there hasn't been a really up front talent, like a Pete Franklin, or is it because sports talk, by its very nature, almost by its very definition, is a local thing.⁶⁰

ESPN RADIO

By the end of the twentieth century, the major voice in syndicated sports talk was clearly ESPN radio, the Disney-backed industry giant that, as one might expect, was financially secure, extremely well represented, and a major part of the American Broadcast Company (ABC) family that is also owned by the Disney Corporation. Originally a weekend only service for major market stations founded in the early 1990s, ESPN radio took most of its programming cues from the various designs of ESPN television, including a more modern and upbeat round-table format. While One-On-One and other lesser regarded operations struggle to stay ahead and exist predominantly in the medium and smaller markets, ESPN, with its vast array of television personalities taking up residence in the radio facilities, and its steady stream of guests and guest hosts as well as the presence of broadcast luminaries, quickly began to dominate the all-sports radio industry too.

In July 1994, ESPN radio took its first giant step forward toward impacting the market when they added former Seattle, Tampa Bay, and Boston sports talk host Nanci Donnellan, who broadcasts as *The Fabulous Sports Babe*. Up to that point, ESPN radio exploited only its weekend clearances, which were admittedly extensive but kept limited in order to test the feasibility of expansion. By early 1995, however, ESPN radio did expand, and dramatically so when they began offering Donnellan's show around the country's major and minor markets but only as part of an all-inclusive package with its weekend programming, further placing the livelihoods of lesser network operations in significant jeopardy. ESPN affiliates no longer had the option of airing bits of programming from various outlets, and as a result, *The Fabulous Sports Babe Show* aired on over 140 affiliates terrified of losing their weekend programming, an almost unheard of total for syndicated sports talk during the coveted morning drive spot.⁶¹

In addition to a vast increase in control around the national airwaves, ESPN Radio benefited a great deal by Donnellan's unique presence and broadcasting style. On the surface she appeared to be an updated version of the Franklin-Sterling routine complete with pre-recorded drops and iconoclastic

commentary, but it was with notably radical differences. First of all, as a woman, she brought to the sports talk mix a perspective and a style that had rarely been heard in a format inundated with hyper-masculine and self-proclaimed macho hosts. She was also uniquely humorous and went to great lengths to make her shows interesting and attractive to her predominantly male audience by blending time-tested, almost vaudevillian antics with her uniquely personal approach to programming.⁶² For example, her Franklin-like use of sound elements is organized thematically, and she applies drops that are predictably consistent depending on common broadcast situations that might range from the greeting of a first time caller to the sounds of an exploding bomb when a caller become exceedingly tedious. Through these practices, she was able to create a familiar atmosphere for both callers and listeners, which in turn gave her ample room for improvisation and other over-the-top routines. Moreover, as a woman in a predominantly male-oriented field, she was able to attract an audience simply by virtue of its general curiosity, and she manipulated this effect by treating her predominantly male callers as both lovers and sons, which further added to the excitement of her show.⁶³

Adding to her popularity is the fact that the ESPN radio studios were housed within the same ESPN television facilities, and from the very beginning she was able to gain instant credibility with both listeners and sports industry personnel by virtue of her daily conversations with the men and women on the television side who are regarded as some of the most respected members in all of sports media.⁶⁴ But by 1998, a series of well-publicized squabbles between Donnellan and network management led to her oddly quiet disappearance from the network.

During her brief but dramatic time in syndication, however, Donnellan would establish herself as a major industry player by parlaying her association with the powerful ESPN corporate structure into air time for her throughout the various markets around the country and then seizing upon her opportunity for a remarkable run in terms of self-promotion, an increasingly ubiquitous feature of contemporary sports talk hosts.

Interestingly enough, by 1995 there were the beginning rumblings of movement toward interactive televised sports talk, but this waned considerably in the years to come. For example, Atlanta's Turner Broadcasting System incorporated late night national television sports call-in programming on the Cable News Network (CNN) with veteran CNN sports update man Vince Cellini serving as host. Though Cellini's wry and understated delivery brought his work somewhat up to the modern radio standards in terms of building partisan interest and excitement, it lacked the kind of entertainment thrust that a *Fabulous Sports Babe* or a Pete Franklin might have brought to the radio airwaves.

Some radio hosts, such as Westwood One's frenetic yet increasingly popular host, Jim Rome, do regularly scheduled television programs but rarely if ever take calls. Those who did experiment with this approach typically took their programming cues from the informal and locally produced collegiate *ask the coach*-type programs that have become quite popular with college football fans, especially in the Southeast and West Coast. But its appeal was strictly local. Hence, little was done in terms of interactive call-in television on the network level.

A FUTURE FOR ALL-SPORTS?

Clearly, it is ESPN radio that enjoys the edge with its strong backing and secure finances. They have taken to creating more time slots for well-established industry names such as ESPN television host Dan Patrick and highly respected Washington Post sports columnist Tony Kornhiser, both of whom began hosting afternoon call-in programs heard around the country on network affiliates in 1999. These figures and others ranging from ex-athletes to veteran writers and mildly amusing sport comics have helped ESPN establish on radio a reputation similar to what it enjoys on television. And yet, their dominance continues to be challenged by industry giants such as Rupert Murdoch's multi-billion dollar Fox Sports Network, which muscled its way into the cable television marketplace in the mid-1990's, and smaller concerns such as One-On-One and Westwood One and companies that continue to burrow their way into their partisan local markets in spite of network dominance.

Whether or not ESPN or Fox or even the barely intelligible rantings of Jim Rome mark the wave of the future of syndicated sports talk remains to be seen. Certainly either or all of them have had their share of notable and noteworthy successes, but whether or not the all-sports format can maintain its place amidst the increasing popularity of televised sport and the continued ascendancy of internet-related sport programming will once again provide a test for programmers and production staff. Having come from such humble beginnings and amidst so much skepticism, all-sports may be able to maintain its broadcast niche in spite of industry changes, and with the proliferation of cell phones allowing callers to dial in from the comfort and privacy of their own vehicles, all-sports may have in fact already weathered the storm ahead.

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Notes

¹ Jerry Kutner, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Las Vegas, Nevada, 2 February 1994.

² Curt Smith, *Voices of the Game: The First Full-Scale Overview of Baseball Broadcasting, 1921 to the Present.* (South Bend, Indiana: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987): 6-40.

³ Joel Spring, *Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio, and Television.* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992):98-104. Part of this "convincing" can also be attributed to the influence of the federal regulatory commissions, the FRC followed by the FCC, both of which, in an effort to regulate the onslaught of commercialization over the airwaves, dictated daily and weekly programming requirements that were expected to be met by each broadcasting concern.

⁴ See Spring, 97-109. Spring reports that this occurred much to the dismay of religious and educational watchdog groups who believed that advertiser control of the airwaves was destroying American morality and culture. It must be added, however, that later these same groups would find themselves able to influence programming by joining forces with many of the advertisers they had fought against previously. Furthermore, while advertisers today do continue to exert pressure for better programming, they are not able to dictate programming to the extent that they had in previous periods of commercial radio's development.

⁵ This is especially true in the case of immigrants who were being systematically exposed to American sport as a means to expedite assimilation. See Steven A. Riess, "Sport and the Redefinition of Middle-Class Masculinity in Victorian America." In S.W., Pope, Ed., *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives.* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997):173-197.

⁶ KDKA, Pittsburgh, one of the nation's first commercial broadcasting companies, was the first to broadcast baseball during its initial year of operation in 1921. Originally baseball was broadcast in the form of re-creations with innovative studio hosts presenting coverage culled from wire reports and peppered with sound effects for emphasis, but that gave way to nearly complete on-site coverage in the aftermath of WWII.

⁷ Spring, 1992:31-48. His italics. See also Gorn, Elliott J. and Goldstein, Warren. *A Brief History of American Sports.* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993) and Benjamin Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports.* 4th Edition. (Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999).

⁸ Smith, 125-143. See also David Klatell and Norman Marcus, *Sports for Sale: Television, Money, and the Fans*. (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1988):24-28, 113-150. Television would not be immune from this either. Pro football's first Super Bowl Game, played in January 1966, was broadcast on both NBC, the American Football League's network, and CBS, the National Football League's network.

⁹ Spring, 31-48.

¹⁰ Smith, 6-40.

¹¹ Stan Martyn, Interview by author. Tape Recording. New York, 10 November 1994. See also Wayne Munson. *All Talk: The Talkshow in Media Culture*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1993):36. Munson reports that Barry Gray of WMCA, New York, claims to have "invented" the call-in format quite by accident in 1945. Having grown bored during his overnight, music-oriented talk program one evening, Gray carried on a lengthy phone conversation over the air with bandleader Woody Herman.

¹² These are the most often cited debates in New York City during the period in which sports talk develops. See Geoffrey Norman, "Yak Attack," *Sports Illustrated* (October 8, 1990):108-121 and William Taaffe, "The Mouth That Always Roars." *Sports Illustrated* (November 22, 1982):68.

¹³ Smith, 6-40.

¹⁴ Martyn, 10 November 1994. Also Stan Martyn, Interview by author. Tape Recording. New York, 10 February 1995.

¹⁵ A flagship is a local station that airs the original broadcast and subsequently transmits the original to the other stations along a pre-determined broadcast line.

¹⁶ Martyn, 10 February 1995.

¹⁷ Though he lacks a measure of public acclaim, Marty Glickman is truly one of the pioneering people in sports broadcasting. Among other experiences, Glickman was a member of the 1936 Olympic 4x400 meter relay team, though because he was a Jew, he would be barred from competing in the Berlin games by AOC President Avery Brundage. Nevertheless, he would go on to become one of the most prominent voices in New York and national sports for over four decades, broadcasting everything from basketball to football and serving as mentor to some of today's biggest names. See Marty Glickman, *Fastest Kid on the Block: The Marty Glickman Story*. With Stan Isaacs. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Martyn, 10 November 1994 and 10 February 1995. See also Stan Martyn, Interview by author. Tape Recording. New York, 5 June 1995.

¹⁹ See Robert Lipsyte, *SportsWorld: An American Dreamland*. (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co, 1975):170-184. It must be noted here that while the traditional relationship between sports and the media has proved to be lucrative to both institutions, the media is always at the mercy of the teams. The annals of sport journalism and broadcasting are replete with tales of writers and broadcasters whose careers were ended due to disputes with team management for any number of reasons.

²⁰ Four to six or seven, depending on the market.

²¹ Eastern teams playing in western time zones had the luxury of airing talk programs before night games.

²² These were considered the optimal listening hours for the targeted demographic of men ages twenty-five through fifty-four.

²³ Martyn, 10 November 1994; 10 February 1995; and 5 June 1995. See also Jim Memelo, Interview by author. Tape recording. Chicago, Illinois, 27 August 1994, and Jim Memelo, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Chicago, Illinois, 9 November 1994.

²⁴ Kurt Kretzschmar, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Chicago, Illinois, 16 June 1995.

²⁵ Memelo, 9 November 1994.

²⁶ Munson, 1993:41.

²⁷ David George, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Cleveland, Ohio, 10 February 1995; Also Martyn, 10 February 1995 and Ken Beatrice, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Washington, D.C., 10 February 1995.

²⁸ Franklin, 270.

²⁹ George, 10 February 1995.

³⁰ Peter Laufer. *Inside Talk Radio: America's Voice or Just Hot Air?* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995):42-43.

³¹ *Ibid*; 43.

³² George Green, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Los Angeles, California, 21 February 1995.

³³ Laufer, 42.

³⁴ George, 10 February 1995, and Pete Franklin, Interview by author. Tape Recording. San Francisco, California, 9 February 1995. As an aside, but on the aforementioned topic of *good radio*, Howard Stern's reputation was cemented not by his fans who would tune in to all three hours of his morning drive show locally but by disgusted and enraged listeners who would tune in for the first two hours just to prove to themselves how degrading his show really was. See Howard Stern, *Private Parts*. (New York: Pocket Star Books, 1994).

³⁵ George, 10 February 1995, and David George, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Cleveland, Ohio, 13 February 1995. George went on to cite the staggering Arbitron numbers Franklin was pulling between the years 1975 through 1977 as the model for which the industry aims even today.

³⁶ George, 10 February 1995. See also Taaffe, 68.

³⁷ Bunker, Carroll O'Conner's lead character in Norman Lear's serial "All in the Family," often reminded his son-in-law, Michael Stivak, played by Rob Reiner that he was "a meathead—dead from the neck up. A meat head!"

³⁸ Broadcasters tend to utilize delay techniques of anywhere from seven to ten seconds to allow offensive or vulgar programming to be erased before it ever hits the airwaves.

³⁹ George, 10 February 1995 and Dave Dombrowski, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Cleveland, Ohio, 21 February 1995. Also, this effect of having callers set-up while the audience anticipates something imminent is what producers and programmers often refer to as *good radio*, a sort of sophomoric ruse that has the potential to draw or hold listeners that translates into audience shares.

⁴⁰ As an interesting aside, one of Franklin's long-time regulars, Mr. "Know-It-All", is actually Mike Trivissano, who took over *Sportsline* when Franklin left for New York's WFAN in 1987.

⁴¹ George, 10 February 1995 and 13 February 1995. Also Dombrowski, 21 February 1995 and Beatrice, 10 February 1995.

⁴² Dombrowski, 21 February 1995. Dombrowski aims most of his comments at the more *chat*-oriented sports talk hosts, specifically the aforementioned Ken Beatrice, who in a previous interview remarked that though he may be a dinosaur in his approach, he feels that Franklin's success was less attributable to his technique and more attributable to a lack of competition. (See Beatrice, 10 February 1995)

⁴³ Norman, 113.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*; 113.

⁴⁵ George Green, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Los Angeles, 21 February 1995.

⁴⁶ Mornings six to ten, and considered the most important slot of the day.

⁴⁷ Memelo, 27 August 1994. Memelo was a producer at WFAN during that first year.

⁴⁸ Quote taken from a WFAN advertising packet.

⁴⁹ Martyn, 10 November 1995 and Green, 21 February 1995.

⁵⁰ Steve Butler, "Has All-Sports Hit the Wall?" *Radio Only* (July, 1993):12.

⁵¹ Butler, 12.

⁵² Butler, 11-12

⁵³ Dave Harbison, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Chicago, Illinois, 27 August 1994. Harbison believes that while Philadelphia was capable of sustaining all-sports without play-by-play and guests, a town like Detroit, for example, is much too sophisticated, yet provincial, for Bigby's basic approach to programming.

⁵⁴ Klatell and Marcus, 55. The latter dilemma results from potential affiliates being either unable to fit network programming into their busy schedules, or their simply being unable to find suitable programming for their particular listeners.

⁵⁵ Providing live on-sight updates.

⁵⁶ Memelo, 27 August 1995.

⁵⁷ Jerry Kutner, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Las Vegas, 2 February 1995.

⁵⁸ When they do appear in major markets, it is often only at low frequency affiliates.

⁵⁹ Jim Glass, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Cleveland, Ohio, 9 June 1995.

⁶⁰ George, 10 February 1995.

⁶¹ Kurt Kretzschmar, telephone interview, 16 June 1995. Remarkably, the only to station to drop her during this time was KNBR, San Francisco, which did so due to a format change and not a programming decision. The show was picked up only a few hours later by another local station.

⁶² Her delivery is reminiscent of 1980's era comedienne Judy Tenuta.

⁶³ Kretzschmar, 16 June 1995. She often fluctuates between "Do it to me darling" and "Tell Mama what's on your mind, sugar". See also The Fabulous Sports Babe. *The Babe in Boy Land*. With Neal Karlen. (New York: Regan Books, 1996):43-82.

⁶⁴ Kretzschmar, 16 June 1995. Also Kurt Kretzschmar, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Chicago, Illinois, 8 June 1995; Martyn, 5 June 1995; and Memelo, 9 November 1994.

