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A Rhetoric of Sports Talk Radio

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A Rhetoric of Sports Talk Radio

by

John D. Reffue

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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A Rhetoric of Sports Talk Radio

John D. Reffue

ABSTRACT

Sports talk radio is a broadcast format that has grown exponentially through the 1990's and into the early part of the twenty-first century. Academic publications about the format, especially qualitative analyses, have been extremely limited and previous radio content researchers have called for a more in-depth study of talk radio, in particular the relationships between and among callers, hosts and the listening audience.

This study examines sports talk radio as a format separate from political talk radio programming. An evolution of the format from its roots as a broadcast novelty to the modern day stand-alone genre is traced, including an examination of select individuals who pioneered the genre and advanced it against high industry skepticism.

From September 13, 2004 though September 17, 2004, programming was tape recorded both from a nationally syndicated sports talk radio program (*The Jim Rome Show*) and a locally broadcast program (*The Steve Duemig Show*). Calls from listeners of the shows were transcribed to isolate patterns and recurring themes that may be emblematic of the format specifically. In the case of *The Jim Rome Show*, callers were found to employ specific strategy to gain favor with the host and ultimately become celebrated parts of the show in their own right. The concept of intertextuality is

introduced to help describe the strategy used by callers to Rome's show, the highest rated nationally syndicated sports talk show in the country.

Additionally, local sports talk programming is examined to isolate how callers utilize that format to deepen their experiences as sports fans by using the format as a vehicle toward empowerment. Issues of identity, both individually and as a community, come together in the study of local sports talk radio as callers, hosts and the listening audience strive together to become members of a "real" sports town.

Finally, implications for future research are discussed, including predictions of how sports talk radio will continue to influence the sports themselves and deepen and change what it means to be a sports fan in the modern era.

Chapter One

Introduction

On October 7, 1988, shortly before 6:15 p.m., I sat alone in a cramped dormitory room in Lawrenceville, New Jersey listening to a piece of broadcasting history:

I'm Alan Colmes. Thank you. God bless you. And for the last time, this is 66, W-N-B-C, New York. Let's do the countdown. 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-(sound of familiar NBC xylophone jingle in background) 2-1. (in distance) You heard the countdown...it's over (groaning followed by subdued applause).

I made time that day to be near a radio when the legendary New York City flagship station of the NBC radio network signed off for the last time. I have always had a deep appreciation for the history of radio, and on that day, it was important for me to bear witness, to be present at a death. It was something I wanted to do alone.

WNBC was the last of a dying breed, the last major AM station in New York to play music. Behind the microphones at WNBC through the years sat radio legends: Wolfman Jack, Bruce "Cousin Brucie" Morrow, Soupy Sales, Don Imus and Howard Stern. But on that day it was Alan Colmes (the current co-host of the Fox News television program *Hannity and Colmes*) who would literally have the last word. In the studio with him were numerous alumni of the station, some in tears as the station faded to dead air. There were also current and former NBC executives and television news crews. The

higher-ups at Emmis Broadcasting, who acquired WNBC in a \$39 million deal earlier that year, demanded that moment be recorded as nothing less than a major broadcasting milestone.

Sixty-six years of 66 WNBC were gone.

What I didn't realize at the time is that, after just a few seconds of silence, I was to also be present at the dawn of a new concept in radio: a big city station with a powerhouse transmitter dedicated twenty four hours a day to everything sports. From out of the silence came a booming voice...

Sports radio 66, W-F-A-N, New York! Sports radio 66, W-F-A-N, New York!

Though it had been on the air since July at a spot much higher on the AM dial (1050 kHz), WFAN was born anew that evening at Shea Stadium. Broadcasting for the first time on the 660 kHz frequency, the show was conducted live from a parking lot at the Flushing Meadows home of the New York Mets. The combination of the station's clear channel frequency and 50,000 watt transmitter allowed WFAN to be heard during the day in a sizeable portion of the northeast and at night from Northern Ontario to South Carolina.

But apparently the audience wasn't ready to be thrown into the new all-sports format. Longtime WNBC personality Don Imus was the only former personality hired to stay on at the new WFAN in his traditional morning drive slot. Imus, of course, was a New York radio legend who garnered huge ratings. Ironically, it was longtime Imus sidekick Larry Kenney who uttered the first words on WFAN as they began their new era on a new frequency. But instead of seriously talking sports (at least right away), Kenney

introduced Imus, in character as The Right Reverend Doctor Billy Sol Hargus, “God’s Other Son.” For radio listeners in New York it was, in more ways than one, a whole new ballgame.

What is Sports Talk Radio? (Player Introductions)

Sports talk radio is a broadcast format that has exploded since the early 1990’s in terms of both audience popularity and the sheer number of stations programming the format. According to Snyder (2004), there are nearly 500 radio stations in the United States who identify themselves as being sports talk stations, with nearly 20% of those stations owned by corporate radio giant Clear Channel Communications. While the total number of radio stations in the United States is nearly 14,000, the number of sports radio stations is still very significant, especially as an indicator of the format’s popularity around the nation. The target audience for sports talk is overwhelmingly male.

The explosive growth of the genre has paralleled the growth of televised coverage of sports in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. While cable outlets like Fox Sports, Sunshine Network, YES, MSG and a host of other regional cable outlet flooded the airwaves with coverage of everything from the National Football League to high school track meets, the sports talk radio format began showing up in market after market around the nation at the same time, offering fans both a portable source for sports information *and* an outlet that encouraged and invited them to sound off about what they liked and didn’t like about their favorite teams, leagues and players. Stations like New York’s WFAN, Philadelphia’s WIP and Boston’s WEEI began to give the nation a sense of what it meant to be a sports fan in these regions of the country. The rest of the mass media took

notice and today these stations have become just as synonymous with and reflective of their local markets and local communities as WNBC once was to New York City.

Technically, there is a difference between a *sports* radio format and a *sports talk* radio format. The differences are subtle and found in programming content. While both formats usually feature traditional host-caller type programming, sports radio may include play-by-play coverage of a sports team(s) and/or non-sports programming that appeals primarily to men (i.e. in some markets, a station may start the day with *The Howard Stern Show* and follow it with sports intensive programming for the rest of the day). Sports talk radio is usually programmed exclusively with traditional host-caller programming.

Sports talk radio fits into a larger genre, broadcast talk shows, especially news/political/public affairs radio shows, which have been the topic of numerous scholarly explorations. Kohut, Zukin and Bowman (1993) described callers to talk radio programs as true opinion shapers who speak smartly, rather than passive consumers of programming. Barker (2002), Hutchby (1996) and Bick (1987), analyzed news and political talk radio's history as a persuasive force in American political and social thought, while such authors as Cook (2000), Page and Tannenbaum (1996), Bolce, DeMaio and Muzzio (1996) and Rusher (1995) have offered largely historical/critical treatments of news and political talk radio's effects on audiences and culture.

Sports talk radio is a nexus of culture, sports, and media. Analyzing the rhetorical strategies and accomplishments of hosts and callers offers a way to stand at this intersection to make larger claims about issues of race, class, gender, identity and community. American sports have never been solely about the games athletes play, but

an arena in which social practices, alignments, and hierarchies are manifested in and across class, race, and gender.

When a black man allegedly rapes a white woman at a Colorado resort, that's a local story played out against a violent history of racism and sexism. When the accused rapist is Kobe Bryant, that's national, talked-about news that juxtaposes that violent history with contemporary constructions of masculine power. When a male soccer star scores the championship winning goal and rips off his jersey in celebration, we celebrate the goal with him. When female soccer star Brandi Chastain does the same thing, we speak not of the athletic achievement, but of the athletic bra she was wearing as one way to focus on and to digress from the politics of women's bodies. When the National Football League was developed, it was envisioned as affordable entertainment for the working man. Today, season tickets for NFL games are financially out of reach for most working class people. The oft-repeated reference to "Da Bears," however, is still a marker of class affiliation through sports.

Sports have always been moments to mark race, gender, class, and their histories in our daily lives and communities. Sports talk radio is a venue worth examining for those marked moments, for the strategies employed in creating that discourses of privilege and oppression, and for the identities and communities formed in that nexus of culture, sports, and media.

Below I review the scholarly literature relevant to the key issues this study: 1) sports talk radio as 1) dramatic, public discursive forum; 2) as *communitas* & confrontation; 3) as masculine space and style. I have grouped the literature in these three

large categories to highlight scholarship on which I will build this study and to indicate gaps in the research that this study will fill.

Talk Radio as Dramatic, Public, Discursive Forum

Rhetoric offers an umbrella to account for both sweeping claims about the intersection of sports and culture, as well as a critical lens to examine the specific strategies mobilized by individuals. Scholars offer constructions and analysis of public sphere, rhetorical forum, and public discourse in ways that are central to this study of sports talk radio.

Fraser (1993) offers a broad definition of public sphere as “[a] space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs” including “an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” (p. 110). Habermas (1989) urges the examination of a more plural “publics.” In their study of television talk shows, Carpignano, Anderson, Aronowitz & DiFazio (1990) do just that when describing a “typology of publics with different roles, functions and uses” (p. 45). Those publics include “edited publics” (i.e., documentary subjects and news interviewees)(p. 45) as well as “real people” recorded going about their activities of daily living (p. 44).

Any examination of public sphere and “activities of daily living,” mandates an account, as Grossberg (1992) argues, of the active creation of context by “forging connections between practices and effects” (p. 54). Andrews (2002) argues that the relationship between culture and sports is very much about creating this context: “To operate within a contextual cultural studies strategy means recognizing that sport forms (practices products, institutions, etc.) can only be understood by the way that they are

articulated into a particular set of complex social, economic, political, and technological relationships that compose the social context...” (p. 115).

Carpignano et al. (1990) point out that in order for a member of the public to “gain full recognition,” he or she must assume the role of the protagonist, a role that broadcast talk shows uniquely encourage. Giroux (1996) writes of radio as a public sphere, characterizing these protagonists, as well as their purposes:

Radio has become a new public sphere, but not one marked simply by audience interaction. The rise of talk radio also signals the emergence of a new type of public intellectual and pedagogy in America... Instead of fueling progressive social movements, growing numbers of Americans appear to be using the airwaves to vent their anger and rage... (p. 143).

Giroux continues to make claims about how talk radio functions in this sphere:

The importance of talk radio pedagogically and politically rests, in part, with its ability to frame debates, mobilize desire, and to make a claim on public memory. The power of talk radio to attract a wide audience of young people and others in the United States suggests something about its pedagogical value in mobilizing individual and collective desires across a wide spectrum of resentment, anger, hunger for knowledge, and need to assert some control over public life (pp. 153-154).

Giroux’s metaphors encourage me to approach the public sphere dramatically, finding fruitful analogies between the drama of daily life and the drama of sports talk radio. When the public sphere is considered a stage—with protagonists and antagonists, abundant outbursts of anger and spleen, as well as collective desires for knowledge and

control—sports talk radio thrives under a dramatistic approach to culture, publics, and mediated discourse. James Combs and Michael Mansfield explain how dramatism argues that...

[L]ife *is* drama. Action means structured behavior in terms of symbols, which implies choice, conflict and cooperation, which men communicate to each other. Society is a drama in which actions, in terms of social symbols are the crucial events. The difference between “staged” drama and the drama of real life is the difference between human obstacles imagined by an artist and those actually experienced. The realms are homologous: life and art both deal with the fundamental problems of human existence, and both aim at the symbolic resolution of conflict through communication (1976, *The Drama of Human Relations*, p. xviii).

If the drama of the public sphere enables large claims about actions, motives, and obstacles in constructing cultural conflicts and cooperations, then rhetorical forum is a second concept that highlights a critical approach to the discursive strategies employed by participants in the drama. According to Farrell (1993), a rhetorical forum “is any encounter setting which serves as a gathering place for discourse. As such, it provides a space for multiple positions to encounter one another. And, in its most developed condition, it may also provide precedents and modalities for granting a hearing to positions, as well as sorting through their agendas and constituencies” (p. 282).

Talk radio as a “forum,” a discursive space for issues presented there, has also been metaphorized by scholars. Tierney (1995) sees talk radio as deeply revealing; a window into what is truly in the hearts and minds of citizens. Weber (1992) called it a

“town meeting of the air,” while Harrison (1994) extolled talk radio as “a bellwether of American opinion.” Laufer (1995) claims, “talk radio has developed into [a] cultural force of consequence in America” (p. 9).

How messages are shaped in this discursive space should also garner critical attention. As Kane (1998) notes, “[T]here is much in the emergence and popularity of talk radio that should inform students of public argument about current rhetorical practices” (p. 155). Brummett (1991) argues that rhetorical criticism should always look to “the social and implication implications” of those practices (p. xiii).

These studies focus on familiar topics and issues for mass communication research. In Carey’s (1988) critique of this research, he claims: “Because we have looked at each new advance in communications technology as an opportunity for politics and economics, we have devoted it, almost exclusively, to matters of government and trade. We have rarely seen these advances as opportunities to expand people’s powers to learn and exchange ideas and experience” (p. 34).

This study seeks to look beyond sports talk radio’s abrasive exterior in search of what lies beneath it. The following pages will explore this broadcast format as a discursive space – a place where many come to make sense of how sports fit into their lives. I believe that in this space, sports fans are afforded a singular and unique venue to cultivate not only a deeper understanding of the sports they love, but to perform community and establish identity(ies), while knowingly or unknowingly contributing to the larger public discourse on race, gender, sexuality and class and politics. I believe this study will not only advance the cause of rhetoric, but also enrich studies in media theory and culture.

Sports Talk Radio as Public Discourse: Communitas & Confrontation

Sports talk has of late become a bigger part of our daily public discourse. At the most basic level, sports talk can be described, as Farred (2000) does, as “a language unto itself” (98). Farred continues: “Sports talk is an uneven, complex, multivalent conversation. Sport is a medium that enables people to talk about several aspects of their lives: regional identification, vicarious athletic accomplishments, race, admiration for physical skill and prowess, gender, hopes, dreams and anticipations, ethnicity, loss and painful defeats” (p. 99).

When this public discourse draws people together to identify with each other, their regions, and their teams in collective and public action, then Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* is relevant to this public discourse. Turner (1969) defines ideological *communitas* as “at once an attempt to describe the external and visible effects – the outward form, it might be said – of an inward experience of existential *communitas*, and to spell out the optimal social conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply” (p. 132).

Those optimal conditions may well exist in the American South during college football season. Zagacki and Grano (2005) used fantasy themed rhetorical analysis to study calls made to a Baton Rouge, Louisiana radio station after Louisiana State University football games. The authors found that sports talk radio gave fans the opportunity to share creative interpretations of the events of those games, which in turn allowed the fans to cope with losses by the team, as well as solidify their regional identity and pride. The study was also critically important in that it stressed the importance of radio talk shows as an important arena for modern academic study.

Several studies have examined how radio has served as a rallying point for building and solidifying communities and identity. Cantor (1992) illustrated how Memphis radio station WHBQ was a pioneer in programming African-American music, making the station a point of reference and centering of/for the African-American community in the middle part of the 20th century. In her book *Radio Voices*, Hilmes (1997) examined how the medium of radio helped shape the culture and identity of the United States in the early and middle 20th century. What makes Hilmes's work so important to this study is her argument that radio played a major role in defining American culture and that studies of radio and television have largely drowned out studies of radio.

Kane (1998) says, "Talk radio...may be viewed as both a form of resistance and as an attempt to create a community" (p. 159), while Balz and Brownstein (1996) say talk radio "encourages a community of the disaffected. It offers solidarity and reinforcement for those alienated from [the power structure], and provides its audience with an endless stream of outrages to harden their discontent" (p. 163). Another attractive aspect of talk radio for those frustrated with not being able to be heard by those in power is the immediate gratification that it provides. As Levin (1987) writes, "Talk radio documents the personal and local exchanges that constitute the immediate and concrete context of experience" (p. 145). Listeners with issues become callers who can and will be heard – venting their ideas, praise, gripes and criticisms to an audience of like minded souls who lift them up and make them feel empowered.

This notion, I believe, relates directly to the bigger picture of both the American citizen and the American sports fan - that of a sense of disconnectedness from the power

structure that governs both matters of state and matters of sports. Just as a citizen cannot bend the ear of the President whenever s/he has a gripe about government, the disgruntled sports fan cannot bend the ear of the commissioner of the National Football League or a team owner whenever his/her favorite team lost a critical game because of a perceived lack of competent judgment on the part of an official or a coach. This idea is summed up by Taylor (1995), “The average citizen feels power to be at a great distance and frequently unresponsive to him or her. There is a sense of powerlessness in the face of a governing machine which continues on its way without regard to the interests of ordinary people, who seem to have little recourse in making their needs felt” (p. 207). Talk radio serves to bridge that distance in more ways than may be obvious. For example, most people who listen to talk radio never call the programs. But if a sports talk radio listener hears another person air a point of view during a call which is similar to their own point of view, it can be argued that a bond exists between and among that listener and the caller, and perhaps the host, creating a sense of community. This parasocial interaction builds bonds between hosts and callers and between and among callers as a community.

While sports is one route to *communitas*, empowerment, and voice, sports talk has also added in many ways to contemporary American “culture wars.” Goldberg (1999) argues that the content of the sports talk radio format “re-creates the artifice of a whitemale [sic] community of like-minded, like-thinking souls” leading to “the death of civil discourse as social control through fan-aticism [sic] takes over” (p. 40). In an article for the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Haag (1996) calls out right wing “hate radio” and its divisive nature, and then offers up sports talk radio as the social and cultural antithesis. Haag sees sports talk radio as a uniquely democratizing force, helping people satisfy their

need to be “thrown together in unexpected, impassioned, even random social communities” in order to “mix with people they have nothing (but sports) in common with. They want to be *from* [author’s emphasis] somewhere again, to be part of a heterogeneous tribe rather than a narrowly defined political cabal” (p. 467).

Talk shows also provide salient examples of what Tannen (1998) calls America’s “argument culture.” She notes just how much the lines between news, politics and entertainment have been blurred in our postmodern world. Perhaps not surprisingly, sports provide the foundation of her following point. Says Tannen, “If politics and other current events have been presented as sports, how sports are presented is also changing, in the spirit of the argument culture. On television and radio, sports events are accompanied by running commentary that encourages and enhances the antagonistic elements of sports, emphasizing the ways that sports can be like war” (pp. 48-49).

Talk shows, whether on television or radio, reflect the argument culture. It’s no surprise then that Hutchby (1996) called radio conversation “confrontation talk,” a reflection of our perceived need to argue. Other theorists are gentler. For example, Livingstone and Lunt (1994) take a more positive view, looking upon the confrontational nature of talk radio as “an opening for the empowerment of alternative discursive practices” (p. 52), an avenue toward fairness and seeing issues and events from a variety of perspectives.

Most studies of sports talk radio up until now have been dominated by critical opinion about the cultural impact of the genre, rather than attempting to take the pieces that make up the *content* of the genre and put them together coherently to illustrate its rhetorical impact. Haag (1996) and Rosen (2002) can be included among those authors,

as can Goldberg (1999), who offers the following criticism of the impact of sports talk radio on class...

Sports talk radio likewise is all about class formation, even as it represents itself as classless – as class blind or class transcendent. How could it escape class formation in a market where 7-year contracts run from \$50m to \$120m, where a 21-year-old golfer earns \$40m on a promise before winning a professional tournament from a company able to pay him only because its product is made by those it barely pays at all. And yet the audience for sports talk radio ranges from the un-or under- or lowly-employed at one end of the contemporary class structure to the beeper/cellular phone/beamer generation at the other (p. 32).

While these type of critical pieces are very necessary in terms of assessing the broader cultural impact of the genre (as well as fostering debate on the genre), the time for the sort of specific analysis that this study will cover is long overdue.

Sports Talk Radio as Masculine Space and Style (The Locker Room of the Air)

What are people (i.e., men) arguing about in public, on the airwaves, with confrontation as their mode of argument? Professional sports have long been associated with heterosexual maleness. The explosion of mass media coverage of sports in the latter days of the twentieth century only served to bolster that relationship. Messner, Dunbar & Hunt (2000) examined what they considered the hegemonic ideologies that televised sports promotes concerning race, gender, sexuality, aggression, violence, and consumerism and came up with what they called “The Televised Sports Manhood Formula”:

What is a Real Man? A Real Man is tough, aggressive and above all a winner in what still is a Man's World. To be a winner he has to do what needs to be done. He must be willing to compromise his own long-term health by showing guts in the face of danger, by fighting other men when necessary, and by 'playing hurt' when he's injured. He must avoid being soft; he must be the aggressor, both on the 'battle fields' of sports and in his consumption choices. Whether he is playing sports or making choices about which snack food or auto products to purchase, his aggressiveness will net him the ultimate prize: the adoring attention of conventionally beautiful women. He will know if and when he has arrived as a Real Man when the Voices of Authority –White Males – say he is a Real Man. But even when he has finally managed to win the big one, has the good car, the right beer, and is surrounded by beautiful women, he will be reminded by these very same Voices of Authority just how fragile this Real Manhood really is: After all, he has to come out and prove himself all over again tomorrow. You're only as good as your last game (or your last purchase) (p. 390).

This provocative quote is a valuable entrée into sports talk radio and masculinity.

Much of the recent scholarly literature on mediated sports talk as a whole (radio and television) examines the genre as a reflection of racial, cultural and gender norms. For example, Sabo and Jansen (2000) point out that mediated sports talk serves as a cross-generational meeting place where traditional concepts of heterosexuality are both passed around (to peers) and passed down (to male children). Sabo and Jansen point out:

“Sports talk, which today usually means talk about mediated sports, is one of the only remaining discursive spaces where men of all social classes and ethnic groups directly discuss such values as discipline, skill, courage, competition, loyalty, fairness, teamwork hierarchy and achievement” (p. 205).

Meanwhile, Farred (2002), calls sports talk an “overwhelmingly masculinist (but not exclusively male), combative, passionate and apparently open-ended discourse” (101). He goes on to define sports talk radio programs as being “orchestrated and mediated by rambunctious hosts” that make for a “robust, opinionated and sometimes humorous forum for talking about sport” (p. 116). With regard to community and identity, Farred also says: “Sports talk is a discourse that can temporarily break down barriers of race, ethnicity, and class. More than that, sport facilitates the transient construction of alliances across racial class and ethnic lines” (p. 103).

Perhaps the two best pieces of academic literature done on sports talk radio have been published in the last five years. In his piece commissioned by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Center for Study of Media and Society, Nylund (2001) examined *The Jim Rome Show* in terms of its relationship to heterosexism and hegemonic masculinity. Nylund’s qualitative study of the show’s content, including the results of his semi-structured interviews with eighteen self-described listeners of the show, suggested that while the content of and approach to the program appears very heteronormative and at times even boorish, the program actually subverts the dominant paradigm on many levels. Nylund notes that Rome’s show “is not a simple, completely obnoxious site of monolithic masculine discourse. Rather, the show represents a complex, paradoxical, postmodern and polyvalent text...a mix of masculine styles, identities and

discourses, ranging from highly misogynistic to egalitarian” (p. 29). Nylund’s close textual analysis of the Rome show, combined with interview responses from show listeners, proves that there is more to sports talk radio than what exists on the surface. Primary among Nylund’s observations is that Rome’s show actually “simultaneously reproduces and disrupts hegemonic masculinity and sexism” (p. 8).

However, not all academics have been as kind to Rome. Mariscal (1999) decried sports talk radio as “more openly racialized than any other radio format” (p. 113) and chided Rome for having constructed for himself a “faux hip-hop persona – generous borrowings from Black English, a gangster rap attitude and an explicit dislike of rednecks” (p. 112) on his rise to syndicated sports radio success. Mariscal went on to criticize Rome for his apparent contradictory discourse of his show, which at times while kinder to African-Americans was seen by Mariscal as blatantly racist toward Chicanos and Latinos. Said Mariscal, “At his worst, Rome is essentially ‘taken over’ by the reified language North American racism, an ironic process that simultaneously solidifies the limits of his ‘nation’ of listeners and undercuts his attempts to get ‘beyond race’” (p. 115).

When these studies of talk radio and sports talk radio examine masculinity and race, they fail to account for how those identities are performed. These performances are constituted in discourse and history. They are created and evaluated against the backdrop of whiteness and through the mobilization of femininity to create masculinity. These performances are deft rhetorical strategies—of callers and hosts—that have emerged through history, are enacted in discourse, and are available for teaching community. This study seeks to explore these performative strategies on sports talk radio.

Purpose of This Study

News and political talk radio shows, the type made famous by Rush Limbaugh, are centered largely on government, trade, politics, and economics, but this study moves beyond Rush Limbaugh, opinion pieces on the talk format, and fantasy analysis of LSU sports fans' discourse. The purpose of this study is to examine the complex and multivalent discourses that make up sports talk radio through the lenses of rhetoric and performance.

These chapters will argue three interrelated points: 1) These discourses have origins in emergent and effacious moments in broadcasting history that became conventions in the genre. 2) These discourses have specific performative forms produced by and evaluated through those conventions. 3) And these discourses serve pedagogical functions for local communities. In making these arguments, this study will reveal the rhetorical and performative strategies deployed by callers and hosts that cultivate and maintain hegemonic masculinity, that mask the authority of whiteness (specifically “whitemaleness”), and that forge identities and communities as a result of that rhetoric and performance.

Put simply, there is much more to sports talk radio than meets the eye (or in this case, the ear). By focusing on the rhetoric and performance of *sports* talk radio, we can become better aware of the unique opportunities the medium offers for learning, exchanging ideas, creating experience, and shaping identity and community through sports. By focusing on the rhetoric and performance of sports *talk* radio, the specific discursive strategies performed by callers and hosts are the building blocks for creating and maintaining those experiences, identities, and communities through talk. By

focusing on the rhetoric and performance of sports talk *radio*, sports, culture, and media come together as unique moments that punctuate our lives.

Methods: Establishing the Lines of Scrimmage

To accomplish these ends, the backbone of this study will be analysis of hosts, callers, performative conventions and rhetorical strategies of two sports talk radio shows, *The Jim Rome Show*, the industry leader in terms of ratings and overall popularity and *The Steve Duemig Show*, the highest rated sports talk radio program in the Tampa/St. Petersburg, Florida media market. I chose these shows for several reasons. Primary among them were their ratings success and my belief that these shows resonate very deeply with the people who listen to them. They also happen to be the shows I am most likely to personally listen to when I listen to sports talk radio. Both programs feature listener call-ins, guests and monologues by the hosts. Rome's show is nationally syndicated by Premiere Radio Networks, a division of national radio giant Clear Channel Entertainment which also syndicates programs by Rush Limbaugh and Laura Schlessinger. Duemig's show is a local program broadcast on WDAE-AM (620 kHz) in Tampa, FL. Fifteen hours of programming from each program were recorded during the week of September 13-17, 2004. Transcripts of the shows, I believe, will elicit the strongest representative examples of the genre and isolate patterns that can help isolate both similarities and differences in local and national sports talk radio programming. The following is a brief history of both men and how their shows evolved:

A 1987 graduate of the University of California at Santa Barbara, Jim Rome began his radio career as a local traffic and sports reporter at station KTMS in Santa Barbara. He then moved to San Diego, where he cultivated his unique on-air persona at

station XTRA. In 1996, Premiere Radio networks acquired the rights to Rome's show and began syndicating it nationwide. Rome's style was a hit, especially with men age 25-54 and as his ratings began to grow, television came calling. During the 1990's, he supplemented his radio show with 2 years at ESPN2 hosting the program *Talk2*. He was then lured to Fox Sports Net where he hosted *The Last Word*. Married and the father of a young son, Rome has returned to ESPN television as the host of *Jim Rome is Burning* and continues to host his radio program, the highest rated nationally syndicated sports talk radio program in the country, airing from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. pacific time Monday through Friday and based in Los Angeles.

Simply put, Rome is to sports talk radio what Rush Limbaugh is to conservative political talk radio. How edgy is he? Here is a typical moment of commentary from Rome from his April 6, 2000 broadcast:

Russian missile silo Anna Pornikova [*sic*] and [Florida] Panthers star and wannabe gigolo Pavel Bure announced that they never had plans to get married despite published reports to the contrary. Her pimp, ERRRRRRRR, spokesman says that the original reports were erroneous and that they should not have been taken seriously. Let me clarify what that means – his client got dumped and they're trying to cover the marks! She finally got treated like the little tramp that she is...[Bure] had her over, he lied to her, he asked her to get married, got what he wanted and then kicked her to the curb! For the last time – win a tournament or GO AWAY! After you've been around the block as many times as Anna has, no one is interested anymore! I can't tell you how classic it is that

somebody did her that way after she's been jerking everybody else around as long as she has!

He is the face and voice of the genre nationwide. His show begins each day with a thunderous clanging bell and the thumping beat of Iggy Pop's *Lust for Life* as the opening theme music. In most of the country, he is competing head to head with Limbaugh, a task he faces without fear. Each day he puts three hours of raucous, in-your-face, jargon-choked musings on sports and current events on the air throughout the country. These musings encourage listeners to phone in and e-mail back to him their own uniquely sarcastic responses, preferably in the exact same in-your-face, jargon-choked way. In the world of sports talk radio, Jim Rome is nothing short of a phenomenon. He is part talk show host, part rock star and sports talk radio's biggest money maker. He travels around the country visiting those affiliate cities he deems worthy of his majestic presence in so-called "tour stops" which feature bands, famous athletes, giveaways, and of course, Rome himself waxing sarcastically philosophical. But to be sure, Jim Rome (both the man and the persona) would not exist without the loyal legions of listeners and fans who show up by the tens of thousands at these events – the men (and a smattering of women) he has dubbed "The Clones." Their calls and e-mails are what fuel Rome's wit and fire. They are a social force and a social unit, complete with their own rhetoric and their own strategy for making sure their voices are heard.

Steve Duemig, known in the Tampa market as "The Big Dog," is one of Tampa Bay's most outspoken sports talk radio hosts. Known for his often angry outbursts and rants against athletes, team owners and callers to his show, Duemig's show airs Monday through Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on station WDAE in Tampa, a station Arbitron has

singled out for making great gains recently in terms of listenership. Born in Pensacola, FL and raised in Philadelphia, Duemig is also a regular contributor to The Golf Channel.

While Duemig's local show doesn't get as much attention or as high a rating as Rome's show, it does what Rome's show cannot. Like other local shows around the country, it brings sports and sports fans down to a more "backyard" level, and gives even more individuals a chance to let their voices be heard discussing the local teams. Analyzing this host, callers, and conventions in relation to the nationally syndicated programming simply enables a closer examination of community-building functions of sports talk radio. Duemig's show is a vehicle for building Tampa Bay's national reputation as a true "sports town," a title hardcore sports fans have long bestowed upon New York, Philadelphia and Boston, but not yet associated with Tampa Bay (although recent world championships by the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning have helped that image to grow). My personal interview with Duemig will also help reveal deeper insights into his program.

Methods: Rhetorical Criticism, Dramatism, and Close Textual Analysis

Rhetorical study and criticism have evolved over time. Similarly, our comprehension of the functions of rhetoric has also evolved. Twentieth century scholars gave us definitions that endure today. Richards (1936) defined rhetoric as "a study of misunderstanding and its remedies." Bryant (1953) called rhetoric the art of "adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas." Corbett (1971) defined it as "the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform, persuade or move an audience, whether that audience is made up of a single person or a group of persons."

While these definitions are classics and are still studied today, this study occurs on the broad playing field of rhetorical study that moves rhetoric beyond the textual to analyze its functions more deeply as cultural. It's no accident that nightly news broadcasts cover three main areas that the public seeks information about – news, weather and sports. To put it another way – 1) What's going on in the world? 2) Am I going to be inconvenienced by rain? 3) How did the Yankees do last night? The rhetoric of sports talk radio is a large part of the rhetoric of our daily lives.

Hart (1990) describes rhetoric as a new and subjective way of looking at something when he says it "...uses common ideas, conventional language, and specific information to change listeners' feelings and behaviors. Rhetoric always tells a story with a purpose; the story is never told for its own sake" (p. 9). Deeper still is the ability of rhetoric to make individuals feel like they are connected to something greater than themselves and their individual lives, which I believe is the main reason that people enjoy being sports fans (or Democrats or Republicans, for that matter). Burke (1945) described literature as "equipment for living" that dramatizes "strategies that sum up a situation." These specific strategies for summing up are rhetorical.

But perhaps the best insight into why a rhetorical approach to this study is so germane comes from Andrews, Leff and Terrill (1998) when they note, "Rhetorical texts can be thought of as storehouses of rhetorical possibilities, as places where people have employed a variety of techniques and strategies to address or change situations through the skillful use of language. It is not only more interesting to study persuasive strategies as they are used and modified by real people trying to accomplish real tasks, but it is also more useful to study them in this way: it is within speech texts that rhetorical theory is

given life, achieves form, and gains coherence” (p. 7). In summary, rhetoric provides a window into how human beings use language to make sense of the world around them and to feel more connected to other people and things. There is no better approach to the study of sports talk radio than a qualitative, rhetorical one.

Kenneth Burke defined rhetoric as “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.” For both rhetorical and performance theory, dramatism enables a view of our daily lives as dramas—with heroes, villains, conflicts, and their resolution. Burke’s view of human beings as symbol using (and misusing) animals whose communicative acts arise from motives maintains *language is action*. Language is more than simply instrumental: it legitimates, thematizes, and performs social meanings. Even *Webster’s Third International Dictionary* acknowledges Burke’s definition of dramatism: “a technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as means of conveying information.”

Through language, we dramatize our worlds. Raymond Williams, in “Drama in a Dramatized Society” (1983), elaborates on this central notion of Burke. Drama “is built into the rhythms of everyday life” (p. 12) such that we experience the world, its characters, and its stories as conflict, build, crisis, and its resolution. Moreover, “actions . . . are being played out in ways that leave us continually uncertain whether we are spectators or participants” (p. 17). Finally, Williams argues, dramatization has become consciousness itself as we envision ourselves as dramatic “types”—“producer or consumer, married or single, member or exile or vagrant” (p. 18). As Brummett (1994) says, “As we go through life experiencing and enjoying music, clothing, architecture, food, and so forth, we are also participating in rhetorical struggles over what kind of

society we will live in and what kind of people we will be” (p. 4). I believe our cultural experience of sports experienced through sports talk radio is part of that constant rhetorical struggle. Dramatism is one lens for viewing, appreciating, and analyzing those struggles.

James Carey, too, argues for a dramatic perspective in his ritual view of communication. Reading the daily newspaper, according to Carey, is not a description of the world, “. . . but portrays an arena of dramatic focus and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it” (p. 20-21). Carey’s observation that a ritual view of communication serves to capture a picture of how society maintains itself in a given time. Says Carey (1985), “[Broadcast news and information] does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic focus and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it” (p. 20-21). By focusing on sports talk radio’s temporal effects, we can 1) begin to better understand how and why the traditional roles of speaker and audience have shifted (in some cases even completely trading places) in our postmodern world and 2) the effects of that shift on both the individual and our society.

Dramatism, and its critical techniques to examine rhetorical and performative strategies, is a perfect methodological fit for sports talk radio. Sports themselves are epitomes of drama: the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, the rise and fall of heroes, the triumph of the underdog. It is little wonder, then, that sports fans want so much to become a part of that drama by and through sports talk radio. Burke’s notion of the representative anecdote, how a culture symbolically constructs stories that epitomize

conflict and its resolution, as well as conceptions of identification through cooperation and competition will be valuable tools for analysis throughout this study. The dramatic rhetoric of hosts and callers is further approached through the seminal work of Richard Bauman who provides a schema for exploring all works of verbal art as performances. With the three-fold classification of performance competence, heightened experience, and evaluation, Bauman maintains that performances are emergent, even as they fulfill criteria of the performance genre and individual enactment.

Discovering and evaluating the rhetorical strategies employed in performances will be accomplished through close textual analysis of transcripts of the programs. Burghardt (1995) defines close textual analysis as a methodology which “seeks to study the relationship between the inner workings of public discourse and its historical context in order to discover what makes a particular text function persuasively” (p. 513). Bick (1987) called on readers of her historical-based dissertation on talk radio to move toward thicker description of what is emanating from those radio speakers. Said Bick, “...the next opportunity for scholarly research might be the use of content analysis methodology to seek increasingly explicit patterns of behavior within the format” (p. 114

Through close textual analysis of transcripts, I will explore the language, roles, rhetorical strategies and performances that comprise *The Jim Rome Show* and the *Steve Duemig Show*. This language is made up of not only common slang, but “inside” jokes and humor, much of it years old and difficult for new listeners to understand. For example, ten years after the killing of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman in Los Angeles, inside jokes about the killings and about O.J. Simpson are still heavily referenced by the host and the callers on *The Jim Rome Show*. More than that, the content

of actual calls, some originally made up to a decade ago and previous, have become legend on the program and are subtly referenced on Rome's program for multiple reasons each week. Those in the know use it, I believe, to deepen their experience as a listener and/or caller and make better sense of the points being made on the program.

In the case of this study, this will mean transcribing and making sense of what may look to the uninitiated as nonsense. The effects, however, reach much further into the fabric of American culture, as important manifestations of masculinity, whiteness, and community identity.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 will deal with the history of sports talk radio and how that history is filled with representative anecdotes and drama that allowed for reflexive opportunities for critique of the times.

Chapter 3 will focus on national sports talk radio, specifically *The Jim Rome Show*. The chapter will delineate the strategic patterns by which individual callers produce successful performances on the Jim Rome show and demonstrate how these same performances fulfill larger social functions for the audience, fandom, and American sports culture.

Chapter 4 will focus on local sports talk radio, specifically *The Steve Duemig Show*. The chapter contends that the central social function of *The Steve Duemig Show* is not social identification or critique but a form of pedagogy enacted through the "coaching" of the host and the resultant team building that results among listeners, all with an eye toward making the Tampa Bay area a "true sports town."

Finally, chapter 5 will offer conclusions and directions for future research, including some cumulative analysis regarding sports talk radio's effects on issues of race, class, gender, masculinity, identity and community.

Chapter Two

History and Development of Sports Talk Radio

October after October in the mid-to-late twentieth century, I was one of legions of American boys sneaking transistor radios into our beds and hiding them beneath our pillows. After ostensibly going to bed, we would slip the earphones or headphones on and stay up late listening to the broadcast of baseball games. Depending on where we lived, we heard the voices of Mel Allen, Vin Scully, Jack Buck, Ernie Harwell, Frank Messer or Phil Rizzuto calling the play by play of a pennant winning game or a World Series nail-biter. For us, these were games we gladly lost sleep over. That transistor radio was first replaced by the Sony Walkman and has since been replaced by laptop computers with wireless Internet connections and portable color televisions as large as those transistor radios. Even so, the feeling is still the same. It was and is the mass media and their hardware that brings millions of us closer to the games and players we love. Today, we still draw our most portable hardware close to our bodies as we immerse ourselves in the joy of winning or the sorrow of loss.

In his essay “Mass Communication and Cultural Studies,” originally published in 1977, James Carey critiques communication studies in the United States for its singular focus on persuasion and social control. As outcomes or effects, the cultural forms of communication are reduced to “objects suitable for attention by students of communication” (1985, p. 45). Such reduction leaves little room for describing or

explaining all those boys tucked into bed with their transistor radios as particular historical moments and as individual relationships to technology. In his book *Exploring Technology and Social Space* (1997), J. Macgregor Wise discusses the relationship between society and technology by pointing out that, [H]istory, per se, has to contend with the *past*, in the sense of ‘the popular past’ or ‘popular history,’ what is generally felt, within a society, to be ‘how it happened.’ The public past is a sense of tradition and collective memory; it is nomadic and rhizomatic. The public past is crucial in constructing contemporary social identity. Therefore, how a public imagines its past relations with technology will have an impact on how it treats its present technology...even if these technologies seem superficially different from each other” (p. 96). Wise’s observations offer an important piece of the puzzle when putting together the historical importance of the sports talk radio genre.

In the simplest terms, the proliferation of first radio, then television, in the twentieth century brought mass communication *close* to audiences in a way that the printed word, which most people previously relied heavily on for their sports information, never could. By and through radio and television, audiences heard the human voices and saw the human faces of air personalities, average people and, most importantly in terms of this essay, sports figures, on radios and television sets in our kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms and automobiles. This forged a highly personal and very intimate connection between fans and the sports they loved.

To begin to explore how sports talk radio fostered such intimacy, one might examine how James Carey (1985) suggested moving beyond traditional methods of social science: “the social scientist stands toward his material—cultural forms such as religion,

ideology, journalism, everyday speech—as the literary critic stands toward the novel, play, or poem. He has to figure out what it means, what interpretations it presents of life, and how it relates to the senses of life historically found among a people” (p. 44). To sketch a history of sports talk radio is to do all those things—to figure out what it means, to glean how life is presented and interpreted in historical moments, and to make educated guesses at how it relates to the lives of a people.

Additionally, James Carey’s *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (1985) offered two cultural views of communication in the United States since serious examination of communication began in the middle part of the nineteenth century: the transmission view and the ritual view. Whereas Carey contends that the transmission view of communication is rooted in a sense of geography (i.e. information traveling over a distance to a source for the purposes of exerting control), the ritual view is more concerned with the maintenance of society in time. News and information (which can, in this case, be expanded to include sports information and sports broadcasts) becomes drama. Says Carey, “It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic focus and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it” (p. 20-21).

This chapter will approach the history of sports talk radio as just that: a dramatic arena with heroes and villains, contending with new technologies and creating the characteristics of the format “on the fly.” Throughout this history, the important moments will be engaged as “representative anecdotes,” stories of origins that reveal emergent answers to newly presented problems: play by play turned to discussion; round-

tables turned to confrontation; masculine talk styles of the locker room and barroom aired on public radio waves. Such dramatic stories wither under the transmission model, but thrive under a ritual model of communication. No longer just senders and receivers, Michael Calvin McGee (1998) noted, our modern technologies of communication have allowed for the traditional roles of speaker and audience to blur, and in some cases virtually reverse themselves. The history of sports talk radio is a drama that mirrors the social milieu and provides reflexive opportunities for critique of that milieu.

Earliest Sports Broadcasts: The Representative Anecdote

Sports talk radio in the United States enjoyed a long adolescence before coming into its own as a media force. During the early and middle twentieth century, radio broadcasts of major league baseball were the most recognizable form of sports talk. However, Halberstam (1999) notes that it was boat races and boxing, not baseball, that were the first sports broadcast on radio: “Radio was actually tested before radio stations were licensed in the early 1920’s and sporting events were a part of the experiment. From a steamship off the New York Harbor, Guglielmo Marconi broadcast an immensely popular event at the time, the America’s Cup. On shore, under the sponsorship of the *New York Herald*, eager fans were able to follow the progress of the race in front of the newspaper building at Herald Square on 34th Street. There was such a rush of people that the crowds blocked traffic” (Halberstam, p. 1).

The era stretching from the end of World War I to the middle 1930’s is often called the first “Golden Age” of sports (see, for example, Schaaf, 2004). Americans in the early 1920’s had a fascination with boxing, and boxing was about to become the very first sporting event broadcast on radio to a wide audience. It was also about to help create

the very first sportscaster. Major J. Andrew White was the editor of *Wireless Age*, an in-house publication of RCA. White was part PR man, part carnival barker with a flair for hype years ahead of his time. Together with David Sarnoff, RCA's legendary general manager who is often called the father of broadcast radio, White hatched an ingenious plan. Boxing champion Jack Dempsey was scheduled to defend his crown in a bout with French champion Georges Carpentier on July 2, 1921. White wanted to broadcast the fight on the air. Why broadcast a boxing match? Halberstam (1999) explains:

In the early 1920s, boxing dominated the sports pages, and coverage of a title fight rivaled that of a world war. The World Series and college football, the closest events in popularity, couldn't compare in sheer public interest. Mainstream America was so consumed with boxing that even the exalted *New York Times* would dedicate half its front page to the fight.

Before radio, live event coverage was non-existent. Newspapers owned an exclusive so folks would run to the closest newsstands to await the arrival of delivery trucks. A newspaper was the closest definition of immediacy (Halberstam, p. 2).

White had answers for all the questions that this venture posed. RCA still didn't have the equipment to do such a broadcast. White convinced the Lackawanna Railroad to loan him a radio tower and the U.S. Navy to loan him a transmitter. He told the fight's promoter that since he had already sold over 90,000 seats for the fight, broadcasting it would only boost the public's interest in boxing. The promoter agreed. Perhaps the biggest issue was the fact that most of the public still did not own radio receivers. So, White petitioned theater owner Marcus Loew and several other owners to place receivers

inside their establishments. Finally, White requested and received a one-day license to broadcast the fight. The assigned call letters for the day would be WJY. White would be the radio call man.

No one, including White, had ever broadcast a sporting event. Relying on his limited experience as an amateur boxer and preparing for the call by boxing in front of a mirror and describing what he was doing, White took to the airwaves at approximately 3 p.m. on July 2, 1921. Public response was overwhelming and sales of radio receivers skyrocketed. White was hailed as a genius for becoming the first ever sportscaster and America's fascination with sports radio had begun (Halberstam, p. 2-3). Boxing would continue to draw audiences to their radios through the 1920s and beyond.

This story, paraphrased as “man with vision and spunk does the never done before in a brand new medium to astounding success,” is typical of Kenneth Burke's representative anecdote, and it will also be typical of the history of sports talk radio that unfolds here. Barry Brummett (1984) utilizes Burke's critical tool, the representative anecdote, to explore mass media content. Brummett then provides tiny plot summaries¹ (like the one above) that “sum up the essence of a culture's values, concerns, and interests in regard to some real-life issues or problems” (p. 164). Mass media content is based on these anecdotes; a history of mass media content is shaped by those accounts. For the media critic, finding these anecdotes is “equipment for living,” for “stories do not merely pose problems, they suggest ways and means to resolve the problems insofar as they follow discursively [*sic*] a pattern that people might follow in reality” (Brummett, p. 164).

For Burke, representative anecdotes are about beginnings: “either an origin in time (temporal) or a necessary starting-point (logical)” (Crabbe 2000, p. 319). Major White is both an origin in time and a logical beginning. In the drama of the history of sports talk radio, White will be the first in the “brash-men-of-vision” protagonists who find themselves up against financial, bureaucratic, and institutional antagonists forces in the drama that evolves as sports talk radio. His “solution to the problem,” doing it bravely, against all odds, with American entrepreneurship and bravado will continue in the history of men, sports, and radio.

Next on the horizon was baseball, and like boxing, radio would fuel the nation’s thirst for and connection with the great American game. Radio allowed baseball to reach people of all socioeconomic levels and helped galvanize the sport as the national pastime. Still, baseball play-by-play was a small part of the broadcast day. During other periods, discussions of sports were “filler” thrown in at random times. That changed during the 1955 baseball season, when WHN, the flagship station of the Brooklyn Dodgers, began to feature play-by-play man Marty Glickman, writer Bert Lee and local broadcaster Ward Wilson in a roundtable discussion that aired before and after each Dodger game. While listener call-ins were never part of the program, listening audiences were treated to the banter among Glickman, a New York Giants fan and Lee and Wilson, both fans of the Dodgers. Word began to spread and New Yorkers tuned in to listen to the arguments. This seemingly minor program planted the first seeds of possibility in the minds of radio programmers letting them know that this type of programming could be strong enough to stand on its own (Rosen, 4-5).

With the “banter” among Glickman, Lee, and Wilson, the antagonism of sports competition on the field is (re)created narratively, discursively, and dramatically in the announcer’s booth. More importantly, the democratic ideals of American citizenry-- based on voice, participation, and informed opinion (Carey 1985)--is enacted at the ball park. Raymond Williams speaks to the developmental relationship between communication and institutions, important to understanding the model that was being created for live sports broadcasting:

Many of our communication models become, in themselves, social institutions. Certain attitudes to others, certain forms of address, certain tones and styles become embodied in institutions which are then very power in social effect. . . . These arguable assumptions are often embodied in solid, practical institutions which then teach the models from which they start. (1966: 19-20 *Communications*).

In sixty years, the sports talk format—before, during, and after the game—has evolved from the genial, competitive banter of men who talked about a table in 1955.

Sports Talk Radio Takes Shape as Reflexive Opportunity

During the 1960’s, the interactive nature of sports talk radio slowly began to take shape. Roundtable discussion along with individual commentary began airing on more stations nationwide. Timeslots for the broadcasts were mainly during evening hours and the stations airing these broadcasts were mostly flagship stations of major sports teams. At that time, teams had significant influence over their flagships and acted to minimize criticism of team management. That meant that hosts, guests and for the first time callers, underwent close scrutiny so as not to sound too hostile toward a team or team

management (Rosen, p.5). Hostility toward management, however, went way beyond sports in the political upheaval of the 1960s.

In Richard Lipsky's essay, "Toward A Political Theory of American Sports Symbolism," he singles out the 1960s as especially important in attacks on the culture of American sports: the "left" attacked "anti-life" and "fascist" approaches to sports; the black power movement attacked racism in sports; the women's movement saw sports as the "epitome of sexism in American life. The attack on the sports establishment ideologically replicated the attacks on other American institutions" (1978, p. 347).

The interactive nature of the format took root in local stations in New York City. By 1964, at least 3 sports talk shows were airing in that market regularly. Art Rust, Jr., an announcer at WMCA, is credited by broadcast historians with being the first sports talk host in New York to air calls by listeners. Perhaps not coincidentally, the political upheaval of the 1960's was beginning to take root at this time. While the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Woodstock and the height of the public protests of the Vietnam war were still a few years off, the handwriting was on the walls.

As the 1960's progressed, ownership at WMCA became increasingly critical of Rust for what they deemed a boring and dry delivery style. In the streets and on the college campuses of New York, like in so many other cities around the nation, very loud and very raucous public protests of the Vietnam war, racial violence and bigotry, and women's rights were the order of the day. While it is not accurate to say that the inclusion of caller content to sports radio at the time represented a *mirror* image of what was going on in the streets, one can argue that it was, in a sense, a reflexive opportunity to comment and to critique. Victor Turner (1988) comments on how cultural media and its enactments

are *reflexive*: “a sociocultural group turns, bends, reflects back on itself, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other components that make up their public selves” (*Anthropology of Performance*, p. 24). Sports talk radio soon would be saturated with these turns and bends.

After replacing Rust with numerous other personalities, John Sterling (who today is the lead radio play-by-play broadcaster for the New York Yankees) brought his raucous, confrontational, yet knowledgeable style to the airwaves in 1970 and became New York’s most recognizable local sports talk radio host. Sterling’s show was tame by today’s standards, but was pioneering in that his style was at times openly confrontational, harsh and berating of callers that disagreed with him. What Sterling created was a “theater of the mind” perfect for a New York audience. Radio personalities at that time were still required to maintain a certain sense of propriety and pleasant conduct. Sterling bucked that trend and along the way got the attention of the FCC who monitored his show carefully waiting for him to cross the line. Station owners both inside and outside of New York knew that Sterling’s approach made for great radio. The content caused a buzz and got people listening to and calling their local stations (Rosen, 5-6).

“Bucking the trend” in the 1960s was de rigueur, and Sterling suggests a shift in the representative anecdote of sports talk radio from “brash visionary” to “harsh and confrontational.” The protests, picket lines, and anti-war demonstrations, and their critiques, have moved to the radio sound booth .

Loudmouths and Masculinity

Cleveland's Pete Franklin, took the genre to new theatrical heights and is credited with making sports talk radio a nationally recognized phenomenon. A Boston native, Pete Franklin was a general talk show host schooled in traditional radio journalism who also loved sports. After climbing the ladder of small and medium sized stations in a variety of markets, Franklin came to Cleveland in 1967 and began his signature program *Sportsline* on WERE, a small 15,000 watt station. During this time, Franklin was working himself into the ground. *Sportsline* would run at least three hours, sometimes four. He would follow that up with overnight shifts of five to six hours of general talk shows. In 1970, Franklin moved to WWWE (or "3WE" as it was known in the market). WWWE had a 50,000 watt transmitter which at night could reach as many as 38 of the 50 United States, Canada, Mexico and even some of the Caribbean Islands. This allowed Franklin's arrogant, abrasive brand of sports talk to come to the attention of not only listeners, but station owners and industry programmers nationwide (Rosen, 8-9).

Rather than pretend that Franklin was in any way traditional, WWWE decided to promote Franklin on the air as he was, a self-described "obnoxious loudmouth." On-air brawls with callers were referenced on Franklin's show for weeks after they aired. Franklin's show became synonymous with Cleveland sports through the 1970's and into the 1980's. His success with Cleveland listeners can be attributed in part to the fact that during the height of his show's popularity, the local professional teams (the NFL's Browns, the NBA Cavaliers and MLB's Indians) were languishing at or near the bottom of the standings. Franklin was relentless in his criticism of team ownership. One local NBA owner thought Franklin had finally taken his criticism into the realm of the

criminal. Thus began perhaps the most important court case ever to involve what can be said on sports talk radio.

Ted Stepien, a Cleveland advertising mogul, bought the Cleveland Cavaliers in 1980. Among other things, Stepien infuriated local fans and media throughout the early 1980's by consistently trading away high draft picks for veteran players of questionable ability, changing coaches four times during the 1981-1982 season (including hiring, firing and later re-hiring Bill Musselman) and threatening to move the team to Toronto in the spring of 1983. For Franklin and his listeners, it was open season on Stepien. The following are transcripts from the case of *Stepien v. Franklin* [Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court Case No. 058404 (1986)] isolating what Stepien alleged was defamatory and intentional infliction of emotional distress. In the following excerpts from Franklin's show, the underlined areas represent just some of the exact phrases that Stepien's legal team alleged were defamatory:

Franklin: "No team in the history of any professional sport has ever been subject to a double moratorium and has been called 'too stupid' by its own league office to conduct its normal business. *Twice in the history of the franchise, the NBA by its own legal actions has declared Ted Stepien too stupid.*" (March 15, 1983 broadcast.)

Caller: "Listening to the Ted Stepien tape, if I remember correctly he said first round draft choices are easy to get?"

Franklin: (Laughing) *Well, whatever he said, we know he lies and we know he's crazy. What else do we need to know?*

Caller: Well I just don't understand this man...

Franklin: *He's crazy.*

Caller: He cannot, every time he opens his mouth he plants...his foot firmly...

Franklin: Right. That's right. *He's nuts. He's nuts. He's certifiable.*" (March 15, 1983 broadcast)

Franklin: "It doesn't make any difference what Ted Stepien says.

Caller: That's true.

Franklin: *He's a pathological liar.*

Caller: Yes.

Franklin: *And he'll say one thing at 10:00, at 10:05 something entirely different. Other than being a certifiable nut and a pathological liar, there is really probably nothing wrong with the guy other than that. So I would pay attention to a handshake agreement with a man who has the ethics of a snake."*

Caller: There clearly has never been a precedent like this in any sport.

Franklin: *Yes. The league office said, 'you're too dumb to exist and stay in business and you're too dumb to trade. Twice. They issued*

a moratorium on TS – ‘Too Stupid’- twice.’” (Broadcast date unclear)

Franklin: “We’re talking about a real, honest loony. I don’t know what the NBA has in mind officially. I know unofficially what the opinion is. They are willing to do anything and every-thing in their power to divest themselves of Stepien. He is an infestment [sic], a cancer, that has screwed up the league, has escalated the salaries and is responsible for everything from venereal disease to whooping cough.” (March 14, 1983 broadcast)

In his ruling on the matter, Judge Burt W. Griffin found the following:

“Franklin’s program is based primarily on the common sports knowledge of his listeners. In many respects, the interchanges between Franklin and his callers resemble the locker room dialogue of informed, opinionated amateur athletes about the world of professional sports” (p. 7). He went on to categorize Franklin’s comments as tending “to be made in broad terms, often meant to be outrageous, provocative, and/or humorous.” Ultimately, Franklin’s comments were deemed by the court to be nothing more than hyperbolic hot air and Griffin found for Franklin, ordering Stepien to pay all legal costs. Said Griffin, “Franklin’s diatribe consisted of the common language of a tavern or locker room sports outburst transferred to the airwaves. It is perhaps the style on the air of the emotional sports fan in a barroom discussion that attracts Franklin’s audience. Such radio dialogue cannot be regarded as ‘atrocious and intolerable in a civilized community’ however much one might prefer a different public style” (Griffin, p. 13).

The representative anecdote has again shifted gears, this time with the aid of the court system, from the “brash and confrontational man” to the discursive worlds of bar room and locker room. This important judicial approval firmly locates sports talk in the world of men, in the places they inhabit, and the discourses they create in those public places. Dale Spender speaks of the neighborhood tavern and Ann Whitehead’s research in a community in Herefordshire, England:

The pub is the centre for talk and it is almost exclusively a male preserve, so the meanings of women are not allowed to surface in this context. Whitehead states that in the pub a great deal of ‘verbal dueling’ goes on among the males, and that male supremacy, and male dominance in their own homes, is fundamental to this ‘verbal dueling.’ (*Man Made Language*, 1980, p. 113).

A court had now determined that high-octane, pointed, boisterous talk radio was within the scope of protected free speech. That this “free speech” was typical of male spaces and styles further naturalized, endorsed, and valorized masculine styles of talk on the radio.

Franklin’s *Sportsline* continued, and with it came the development of some of the staples of the format today. For example, it was Franklin who began using television and radio soundbites (from both sports and news and entertainment) to up the entertainment value of his show. Franklin would drop those soundbites in at random times to incite laughter or to clinch a point. One of his favorite recorded bits was that of actor Carroll O’Connor in the character of Archie Bunker, deriding his son in law Michael Stivic as a “meathead – dead from the neck up!” During particularly heated calls where he disagreed with a caller, Franklin would often stop talking completely and end the call with the

“meathead” clip before simply disconnecting the call. Franklin was unabashed. He continued to describe himself as an “obnoxious loudmouth” and reveled in the acerbic back-and-forth between himself and his callers. Franklin was a new breed of radio personality and despite the risk of vitriol, listeners couldn’t get enough. The radio became the media’s version of the neighborhood pub.

Pete Franklin is also credited with starting some of sports talk radio’s most enduring characteristics. It was Franklin who first began featuring repeat regular callers who would become known on his program by creative, identifiable nicknames. One such featured caller was known as “Mr. Know-It-All.” When Franklin finally left WWWE for New York’s WFAN in 1987, that caller, whose real name was Mike Trivissano, actually took over for Franklin at WWWE. Almost two decades later, a former regular caller to the Jim Rome Show known as “J.T. The Brick” now hosts his own nationally syndicated radio show on Fox Sports Radio. These characters, too, might be considered stock characters in the newest representative anecdote of sports talk radio: Man at bar makes everyone laugh and cringe while holding forth.

The Birth of WFAN: Lots of Watts and In Your Face

During the 1980’s, talk radio experienced a renaissance and broadened its scope and reach in terms of both content and audience. The AM dial, which for decades had broadcast talk and music programming, faced extinction as FM stereo broadcasts improved and FM stereo receivers (including the popular Sony Walkman) became more inexpensive and popular. At the same time, the business end of radio began to change. Federal rules regarding ownership of stations and format and content guidelines were loosened in a sweeping federal deregulation of the broadcast industry. That meant large

corporations now had the chance to expand their holdings. The Federal Communications Commission was chaired at the time by Mark Fowler, who saw deregulation as a way for more citizens to have their needs met by radio. But what happened instead was a boom in corporate ownership of radio. Entire radio markets began to be dominated by ownership groups like Infinity Broadcasting, who in the late 1980's began to syndicate the popular and controversial Howard Stern Show, first in the Philadelphia and Washington D.C. area and slowly to dozens of markets across the country. By the 1990's corporate owned radio was largely responsible for the overwhelming growth and popularity of both conservative political talk radio and of sports talk radio. Not surprisingly, growing numbers of individual stations followed the lead of WFAN and began solely broadcasting sports talk.

The history of sports talk radio is filled with many famous names. Most of the men and women who became famous in the industry did so through their broadcasts. But one man, Jeff Smulyan, made his contribution to sports talk radio off the air by taking a huge gamble, and for that he will forever be remembered as a pioneer in the industry. In July 1987, Smulyan was the chairman of Emmis Broadcasting. That month, Smulyan launched radio station WFAN, a New York City radio station dedicated solely to sports all day and all night. In the interest of providing perspective, seven years earlier, the broadcast industry laughed, and then urged caution, when Ted Turner started CNN. Six years earlier, the industry responded similarly when MTV came to cable television.

Unsurprisingly, Smulyan was chided by his peers for formatting a station with nothing but sports. Paramount among the industry's critique of Smulyan's idea was that no station could survive by appealing solely to men. It should be noted that the criticism

of those industry insiders (especially from those with 20 or more years of experience) was undoubtedly based on decades old concepts of radio audience analysis which were rooted overwhelmingly in the notion that *all* programming on *every* station must appeal to as broad a base of listeners as possible in order to succeed and attract advertisers. According to Lev (1990), it looked like those industry predictions of certain doom were correct. WFAN lost approximately \$7.5 million in its first year of operation and was near collapse on numerous occasions. On the brink of failure, Smulyan devised a plan to save the station. In July of 1987, he and Emmis Broadcasting bought the holdings of the NBC radio network for \$39 million, including the legendary New York station WNBC. With that purchase, Smulyan instantly got four things: attention, respect, big name programming and a station with a powerhouse 50,000 watt transmitter that could make his all-sports station heard throughout the northeast and at night from Canada to the Carolinas and beyond. Some smaller benefits included the rights to broadcast the NBA's New York Knicks and the NHL's New York Rangers. Plus, Emmis would now have a heavy hitter on their roster that New Yorkers loved.

Though he wasn't a sports star, Don Imus was a radio personality who brought instant name recognition. After completing the purchase, Smulyan moved WFAN from its original 1050 kHz frequency to WNBC's clear channel 660 kHz frequency (AM stations from 540 kHz through the low to middle 800 kHz range are often called "clear channel" stations because of their ability to be heard hundreds of miles away from the transmitter when powered by high-wattage). He fired consummate nice guy Greg Gumbel from his job as morning drive host and replaced him with the abrasive Imus, who kept the general talk radio/comedy format that made him a New York radio icon. That move,

which no longer made WFAN an *all* sports station, accomplished what Smulyan and Emmis Broadcasting wanted. It saved the station financially and unbeknownst to them at the time, it ensured a future for the all sports format. Imus was the catalyst the station needed. From 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. each weekday morning, Imus brought in the listeners, ratings, revenue and reputation WFAN needed to succeed. Sports dominated the rest of the programming day. Listenership rose and by the end of 1989, WFAN had dug itself out of debt and posted a reported profit of \$24 million (Lev, 1999). Today, WFAN is still seen by those inside and outside of sports talk radio as America's flagship sports radio station. Don Imus remains in the morning drive slot. Play by play of the Mets and the Giants are heard on the station and callers are still calling the shows. Jeff Smulyan's million dollar gamble became a broadcasting triumph.

WFAN's story truly is a representative anecdote for the sports talk genre as a whole, a classic underdog story which ends in unexpected success. It began with a gambler (Smulyan), taking a risk with a format that those supposedly "in the know" within the industry said would never work, who added a "loudmouth" personality (Imus) as an insurance policy and ended with the creation of a station that stands symbolically, today, as a historical champion and model for excellence within the industry (much like Babe Ruth is to baseball).² Like the underdog appeals to fans, this format continues to win over new listeners each day by appealing to a variety of concepts that resonate culturally and socially with so many people, whether they are sports fans or not.

The Sports Radio Explosion: Cementing the Form

At the dawn of the 1990's, sports talk radio was a profitable but mainly very city-to-city commodity. However, industry leaders and radio executives were beginning to

recognize that the format could be even more profitable in national syndication. The idea had been tried twice before in the 1980's, but failed miserably. The difference at this time boiled down to personalities and sheer broadcast wattage. Both WWWE and WFAN had powerhouse transmitters that allowed their programs and hosts to be heard in huge chunks of the nation. In a way, sports talk radio was already informally syndicated because of the sheer number of people it was reaching, but these people lived largely east of the Mississippi River.

In the early to mid-1990's, other syndicated talkers *outside* the sports world were beginning to explode with popularity. Westinghouse (later purchased by Infinity Broadcasting, a unit of CBS) had brought the raunchy New Yorker Howard Stern to several huge markets including Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. and would go on to bring his controversial morning drive program to the nation's four top media markets by 1996. Even WFAN's Don Imus was being syndicated in other markets and showing solid results outside New York. But there was one man who was becoming the nation's most recognizable syndicated radio voice – Rush Limbaugh. Even in the wake of the 1992 election of Democrat Bill Clinton, Limbaugh remained extraordinarily popular. He parlayed his talent into book deals and a short-lived syndicated television series. Limbaugh was re-defining what it meant to be a radio star. Stern and Limbaugh, at this time, were indeed cementing their places as the singular model of their genres. They both did it with a combination of bombast and innovation, bucking the decades old system of rules and trends which rigidly dictated how radio was to be presented. Additionally, they actively sought to promote not just their shows, but themselves, a step that both literally

and figuratively put their faces with their voices. Sports talk had yet to find its face, but it would not be long before it did.

Sports radio syndication finally got the backing of a huge, deep-pocketed corporation in the late 1990's when ESPN Radio, a unit of Disney, grew from a weekend only service for large markets, to a seven-day-a-week mirror of their television sports network. Well known ESPN TV anchors like Dan Patrick and Mel Kiper, Jr. would frequently appear on ESPN radio (Dan Patrick went on to anchor his own program, which remains on the air today) and the radio network liberally used the popular "SportsCenter" jingles and name during semi-hourly score updates.

ESPN radio broke gender barriers in 1995 when the network began national syndication of the program of personality Nanci Donnellan. Known as "The Fabulous Sports Babe," Donnellan was a hit in the hyper-masculine world of sports talk with her aggressive yet personal style. She borrowed liberally from the Pete Franklin formula with plenty of shtick and sound effects. She was famous for a dropping bomb sound she would play whenever she had enough of the opinion of a caller and disconnected the call. Frequently during the most heated of arguments with her callers, she would holler "Blow me!" before hanging up. In her 1996 biography, Donnellan described her program and what she thought of working in a format dominated by men:

At its best, my show is theater of the mind. These other sports talk shows are, at best, the outhouse in the rear of the theater of the mind – necessary, perhaps, but not fondly remembered. If nothing else, these other shows give jobs to radio hosts stewing in their own testosterone, who don't know anything beyond eating pizza, jerking off, and playing fantasy football,

today's hobby for tomorrow's serial killers. There is only one piece of advice I can give these hosts and their listeners: Get a job, get a haircut, get a life! (Donnellan, p. 6).

How much of that quote was merely bluster to help hype her program is open for debate. But during the height of her popularity, you could not ignore Donnellan. She was an oddity in the industry and many men tuned in simply to see if she could "hang" with the men. Her success can also be attributed to shrewd business decisions by Disney, who bundled her Monday through Friday show into a package of weekend shows that affiliates were required to air. The affiliate stations desperately needed that weekend programming and as a result, Donnellan's show aired on nearly 150 stations nationwide. Donnellan used her gender to her best advantage. Her callers were overwhelmingly male, and Donnellan had a great talent for talking to them as though she were a lover, a sister, a mother or just another sports fan depending on the vibe she got from the caller. Her in studio guests were often ESPN television personalities talking about the day's sports news, which gave her an added boost of credibility. Donnellan's radio run was brief, but it was still an important milestone in the development of the genre because of her ability to get through to fans as knowledgeable, credible, prepared and fearless. By simply having her name on the roster, and keeping it there for as long as she did, she broke barriers. In 1998, after a series of disagreements with management, she disappeared from the airwaves and sports talk radio was still in search of a signature star.³ That star was about to emerge.

Welcome to The Jungle: THE Representative Anecdote

In 1994, a brash, 30 year old Southern California sports radio host named Jim Rome caught the attention of ESPN executives. His approach to sports talk was unorthodox at best, a program that combined an in-your-face, tell-it-like-it-is style with street slang and background urban music. Rome's style was a perfect fit for the fledgling ESPN2, Disney's spin-off television station that was originally designed to appeal to younger audiences with action sports and a hip, contemporary lineup of shows. Rome signed to anchor the evening program *Talk2* on began to settle in, bringing his biting, sometimes confrontational style to cable television.

It has been said that one moment can make or break a career in the entertainment business. In the spring of 1994, Jim Rome had his moment, and with it came instant national recognition. For years, Rome had openly bashed Los Angeles Rams quarterback Jim Everett on his radio show for what Rome opined was his wimpy playing style and tendency to choke in clutch situations. His critique of Everett was merciless, as were his critiques of many underachieving players in his home market of Los Angeles. On this night, Jim Everett was a guest on Rome's television show. Rome wasted no time comparing Everett to a famous female tennis player with a similar sounding surname. The following transcript is from that broadcast. It has come to be known to Rome's fans simply as "The Incident":

Jim Rome: You may have even been Jim Everett back there [in 1989] but somewhere along the way Jim, you ceased being Jim and you became Chris.

Jim Everett: Well, let me tell you a little secret ... that, you know, we're sitting here right now, and if you guys want to take a station break, you can. But if you call me Chris Everett to my face one more time ...

JR: I already did it twice

JE: You'd better ... if you call it one more time, we'd better take a station break.

JR: Well, its a five-minute segment, on a five-segment show.

We've got a long way to go

JE: We do.

JR: We've got a long way to go. I'll get a couple of segments out of you.

JE: It's good to be here with you though ... because you've been talking like this behind my back for a long time now.

JR: But now I've said it right here, so we've got no problems then.

JE: I think that you probably won't say it again.

JR: I'll bet I do

JE: OK

[short pause]

JR: Chris.

[Everett violently tosses aside coffee table, pounces on Rome]

There has been speculation for years that the whole event was a carefully calculated publicity stunt. That speculation has never been confirmed. Whether it was

staged or not made no real difference. The clip of the incident played over and over again on both sports and news television and radio for days after and Rome was the talk of sports fans everywhere. They became curious about Rome, as did corporate radio executives. Two years later, Premiere Radio Networks made Rome the offer that would catapult him into national stardom, signing Rome to a syndication deal that in less than 10 years would put him on more than 185 stations around the country and expand his fan base from coast to coast.

As representative anecdote, this “incident” operates dramatically on a number of levels: from trickster, boys-will-be-boys, to cultural fears. Rome displays many characteristics of traditional trickster figures, wily, witty, boastful, braggadocio, unintimidated by threats of physical violence, who lure big, aggressive, (and oftentimes) stupid characters into their own self-serving plots. As a typical “boys will be boys” playground encounter, the name-calling escalates into physical violence. Most importantly, Rome utilizes the ultimate insult to heterosexual masculinity: he calls Jim Everett a girl. While “throws like a girl,” is a common sports slur, insinuating that Jim Everett plays like Chris Evert (famous for her two-fisted backhand) belies the multiple championships of her pro-tennis career. Instead, “Chris” is emblematic of femininity: her need to accommodate for lack of upper body strength, her girlish figure, her bobbing ponytail.

Brummett writes that the representative anecdote “taps what a culture *most* deeply fears and hopes, and how that culture confronts those concerns symbolically” (1984, p. 166). Rome has tapped into the most masculine of cultural fears: being called a girl *in*

public and then having to deal with that insult. This moment as formula for radio talk show performed masculinity will be repeated over and over on the Jim Rome Show.

The Format Today

Today, sports talk radio is both solidifying its base nationally *and* growing roots locally. Along with Jim Rome, ESPN's Dan Patrick is enjoying a great deal of success with his nationally syndicated program. Arbitron data regarding male listeners age 25-54, the most coveted demographic in the format, peaked in the fall of 2003 and has slipped since then only slightly. The industry is also currently marveling at the success of Boston's WEEI, one of the only sports talk stations in the country to program solely local hosts for its talk shows.

WEEI launched in August 1994 following much the same formula that helped start WFAN. The Don Imus Show provided a lead-in and the rest of the day was dedicated to sports. In 1998, current owner Entercom Communications bought the station and quickly decided to dump the Imus show in favor of local talent John Dennis and Gerry Callahan, who remain in the morning drive slot today. One of WEEI's most successful attention-getters was developed by afternoon drive hosts Glenn Ordway and Pete Sheppard. Each day at 5:45 p.m., Ordway and Sheppard air the recorded voices of listeners who call "The Whiner Line," a special phone line set up for listeners to call whenever they need to complain about anything in the world of sports. The stunt was so successful that the station now conducts an annual Academy Award-style event each January called "The Whineys" where the best calls and callers are singled out for their success.

The history of sports talk radio would be incomplete without a discussion of how the format has made stars out of the callers who add so much color to the endless hours of broadcasts that are aired each year. While this subject will be discussed in much more depth in later chapters, I find it very appropriate to mention it here because many of these callers helped write the history of the format. Their contributions are invaluable. For many, talk radio is more than just entertainment, it's their lifeline. As Josh Stern of Boston University's *Daily Free Press* (2003) said:

There is something good and pure about the realm of radio stations, as throngs of passionate, faceless, hardcore sports fans call into their favorite shows to argue everything from off-season acquisitions to postseason letdowns. There is also, however, a sad and pathetic aroma that wafts from the airwaves. You get the feeling when you listen to some of these people that they are clearly lacking something in their lives. You almost get the picture of a bald, fat guy with holes in his tank top and Cheetos in his teeth when you hear some of these callers. Some of them are quite uneducated. Many are shot down and put in their place by the hosts of the show. Then you have a select few who rise above the fray. They dazzle fellow listeners with their knowledge and views on the game. They earn the respect of the hosts. They are the true superfans. (Stern, p.1).

Stern's quote again reflects Carey's ritual view of communication with callers utilizing the programming, as well as the programming format, to in a sense insert a small part of *themselves* directly into the sports they love. The listeners/callers assume a social role by and through the unique vehicle of sports talk radio. One WFAN caller, it can be

said, epitomized the ritual view. She was Doris Bauer, known to her fellow listeners as “Doris from Rego Park.” Each night for seventeen years – from the time WFAN signed on the air until she died, usually around 1 a.m., Bauer, a raspy-voiced woman with a chronic cough, would call the station and ask to be put on the air. She was the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. She had an encyclopedic knowledge of the New York Mets collected baseball cards as a child and memorized the statistics on the back. What Doris also had was a condition called neurofibromatosis, a disease whose most visible symptom is tumor-like bumps that grow on the skin. Through the course of her life Doris suffered the ridicule of other people, along with bone, breast and lung cancer. She never dated and never married. Her life, it can be said, *was* baseball and sports talk radio. She talked often about her Sunday season ticket package at Shea Stadium and would sometimes call the station after Mets games to rehash her favorite moments from the game. The hosts at WFAN, especially overnight personality Joe Beningo, were patient with Doris. She loved to talk, and when she talked, she invariably coughed – a lot. The cough became her trademark. She bristled when the hosts would take her call too close to a commercial break. She would end all her calls with another trademark, the simple phrase “Thank you for your time and courtesy.” Doris Bauer died in October, 2003 of complications from breast and lung cancer. She was 58 years old. Radio allowed millions of people to “see” Doris Bauer as she really was: smart, passionate, enthusiastic, cantankerous and very human.

History is Written Every Day

What began with borrowed equipment and radio waves over eight decades ago has grown into one of the most promising and profitable radio formats of the modern era.

Sports talk radio has come into its own and carved a permanent place in radio. Right now on stations around the country, callers are calling, hosts are ranting, corporations are advertising and general managers and consultants are plotting new strategies to boost listenership and bring new stations to new markets. From what was once fill-in banter on pre and post-game radio, sports talk grew into a first a cantankerous oddity and then an undeniably profitable entertainment business, using the drama of sport as a launching pad for listeners to place themselves, psychologically at the very least, closer to the sports that make up so much of the fabric of their lives.

The drama, encapsulated in representative anecdotes, is very much about a ritual view of communication. Sports talk radio does not solely present information and news, but according to Carey, “news is a historic reality. It is a form of culture invented by a particular class at a particular point of history. . . . Like any invented cultural form, news both forms and reflects a particular ‘hunger for experience,’” a desire to do away with the epic, heroic, and traditional in favor of the unique, original, novel, new—news.” (1985, p. 21). The history of sports talk radio, viewed through the ritual model of communication, is the epic, heroic, and traditional returned to news events that would deny them: heroes and villains, the challenges and opportunities of new technologies, reflection and reflexivity, money and politics, masculine bravado and insult, even tricksters and their unwitting victims.

As I conclude this chapter, I would like to again make reference to the earlier quote by J. Macgregor Wise. He noted “[H]ow a public imagines its past relations with technology will have an impact on how it treats its present technology...even if these technologies seem superficially different from each other” (p. 96). The history of sports

talk radio is, in many ways, a history which year after year increasingly invites more and more direct participation from the audience. With that increased participation comes and increasing sense of both cultural and personal connection with sports. What lies ahead in terms of new representative anecdotes remains to be seen. Surely, those anecdotes will drive even more people closer to and generate even more interest in sports as a cultural phenomenon.

Chapter Three

The Jim Rome Show as Rhetorical Forum

Sports talk radio provides simultaneously a likely and unlikely arena for scholarly inquiry. In the quest to continually expand the boundaries of rhetoric and rhetorical studies, inquiry into such untraditional arenas as talk radio can often uncover some of the most provocative, fresh insights into the ways rhetoric is moving beyond the textual and toward the functional.

To the uninitiated, sports talk radio can appear, at best, circus-like and silly, quirky and confusing. At its worst, programming content dips into the realm of the sophomoric and absurd. Nationally syndicated columnist Dave Barry made a sports talk radio conversation a constant call-back in his novel, *Big Trouble*. Two New Jersey mob hit-men, waiting in their car for a rendezvous, hear this conversation:

Host: Where are the Gator fans now? All you Gators call when you WIN, but now that you LOSE, you don't have the guts. . . .

Caller: I'm a Gator fan. And I'm calling.

Host: And what do you have to say?

Caller: You said we didn't have the guts to call, so I'm calling.

Host: Yeah, OK, and so what do you have to say?

Caller: I'm saying, here I am. I'm calling.

Host: That's it? You're calling to say you're calling?

Caller: You said we didn't have the guts.

Host: Because you DON'T have the guts. All week I had all these Gator fans on here, talking trash, and now they run and hide.

Caller: Well, I'M calling.

Host: OK, so what's your point?

Caller: My point is, you said we didn't have the guts to call, so I'm . . . (p. 114-15)

Henry and Leonard, the Jersey mobsters, endure this same conversation no less than five different times in the novel while waiting in their car. Its content, tone, and circularity never change.

While Barry captures a common caricature of sports talk radio, an actual caller, "Jeff in Phoenix," called *The Jim Rome Show* to offer a stinging critique of the September 11, 2004 half-time show at the Stanford-Brigham Young football game. The Stanford band has a long reputation for creatively and playfully ribbing the opposing team during their performances. On that day, five band members emerged during the performance dressed in wedding veils, ostensibly to poke fun at the old (and no longer practiced by the mainstream) Mormon tradition of polygamy. The stunt offended numerous BYU fans and players, forcing Stanford to issue a formal apology for the incident less than two weeks later. In the days that followed, sports talk radio was filled with callers reacting to the incident. "Jeff in Phoenix" had the following reaction...

Hey, I just have uh one take here basically, and, and I just caught the uh tail end of uh, um you mentioning uh Stanford's marching band and uh, that uh just awful display of poor taste. I mean, let's,

let's think about what we have here, uh, Stanford, uh that school is located in the People's Republic of Palo Alto, I think zoning requires, what, like 3 uh vegan cafe's per block and multicultural sensitivity, you know, is the norm there. I mean let's face it, if you ignore a person of a different ethnic background or engage in inappropriate laughter you're going to find yourself in uh, student Nuremberg trials. And then these clowns go ahead and whack another school's religion? The bottom line here is that BYU has standards for behavior and Stanford has standards for thought! And that's just dead wrong. I'm out. (9/14/04)

“Jeff in Phoenix” is an exemplary caller. Though the call is very brief and filled with sarcasm and humor, contains references to history that some people may not be familiar with, and insults the city of Palo Alto, California, Jim Rome praised it at the end of that day's programming as the best call made to his show that day. It is critical to note that this call dealt with absolutely nothing related to an athletic contest beyond the fact that a band was performing on a football field. In a larger sense, this call to a sports talk radio programs *transcends* sports and provides pointed social and sociological critique, asking listeners by and through its rhetoric to critically consider what it means when representatives of one institution of higher learning mock representatives of another based on religion. This call is indicative of how sports talk shows “open a public space where ideas and attitudes of ordinary people seem to matter, enabling the fans and broadcasters to share dramatic interpretations about the relationship between sports and

society, whether or not these interpretations correspond to reality” (Zagacki & Grano, 2005, pp. 45-46).

Sports talk radio programs serve important functions. Those functions include “[The reaffirmation of identity] through mediated interactions in which heroes, martyrs, villains and the role of the fans are recalled and renewed in common appreciation” (Zagacki & Grano, 2005, p. 45). Additionally, the programs function to, as Giroux (1996) suggests, frame debate, mobilize desire and make claims on public memory in regard to sports and culture. These programs also provide an opportunity for fans to actively vent, in one of the most public ways possible, whatever emotions they are feeling regarding sports. They can rejoice in a win, find consolation in a loss, or simply share opinions regarding the hot sports topics of the day, leaving them often feeling empowered in ways they otherwise could not. The genre also functions in a less interactive sense to *inform* listeners with final game scores, the latest trade rumors, etc. For some, that information may simply satisfy a momentary curiosity, but for others, that information may mean a huge financial windfall or loss as the result of a wager or may mean that the receiver just vaulted to the top of the standings in his/her fantasy sports league. For many more listeners, such as Doris Bauer, the genre provides companionship and a sense of comfort similar to that of close interpersonal relationships. I believe this chapter will uncover yet another function of this broadcast format, that of a performance arena whereby callers and audience members act in concert rhetorically to create and re-create meaning(s) through the “stage” of sports talk radio.

Purpose of This Chapter

In an effort to put textual analysis of rhetoric into conversation with these social functions of rhetoric, this chapter will examine transcripts of listener phone calls made to *The Jim Rome Show* during the broadcasts of September 13-17, 2004. The programming aired during that week was typical for the show, featuring the usual assortment of interviews, callers and monologues by the host.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to delineate the strategic patterns by which individual callers produce successful performances on *The Jim Rome Show* and to demonstrate how these same performances fulfill larger social functions for the audience, fandom, and American sports culture. This analysis assumes the standards by which good rhetoric is defined lie within those whose lives are most connected to that rhetoric. According to Brummett (1991), “The ways in which patterns manage meaning, influence people’s attitudes and commitments, induce people’s acceptance or rejection, or lay claim to their allegiance is the rhetorical dimension of popular culture” (p. 196). This chapter will delineate these rhetorical patterns and tie these rhetorical dimensions to popular sports culture.

This chapter will first introduce *The Jim Rome Show* and its typical content, formulas, and layerings. The chapter then offers intertextuality as the best framework for understanding the form. Moving beyond the *presence* of intertextuality, this chapter will demonstrate *how* callers to the Jim Rome Show utilize intertextuality to 1) display performance competence, 2) create social identification, and 3) engage in social critique.

From Clones to Karma: The Jim Rome Show

Today's sports broadcasts are filled with excellent talk show hosts, from ESPN's Dan Patrick to Tony Kornheiser of the *Washington Post* and ESPN television's *Pardon The Interruption* and beyond. Both Patrick and Kornheiser have received much praise from both their colleagues and the listening public for their work. But make no mistake, sports talk radio is first and foremost an entertainment business, and no one in sports radio has done more to entertain and audience and help boost profits than Jim Rome.

The Jim Rome Show is a nationally syndicated sports talk radio program aired by Premiere Radio Networks every Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. Pacific time, featuring host Jim Rome (who is assisted in the studio by long time producer Travis Rogers and show contributor Jason Stewart), invited guests and listener phone calls. Arbitron, the radio industry's most respected source for ratings gathering, places this program first in terms of nationally syndicated sports talk radio programming (see Spencer, 2001, 2004).

I first listened to *The Jim Rome Show* shortly after I moved to Florida in the mid 1990's. At that time, sports talk radio was still in its infancy and like many other sports fans, I found the format to be a great source of both information and entertainment. I had listened to a small sampling of other more "traditional" sports talk shows and enjoyed what I heard. However, from the first time I listened to Rome's show shortly after it began syndication in 1996, I knew I wanted to *keep* listening. The show was not just informative and funny, it was intelligent and subtle. There was certainly some content that went over my head, but the razor-sharp combination of intelligent opinion, engaging

guests, and clever callers kept me listening on my lunch breaks and during quiet times in my office.

On a typical day, Rome will begin the show with greetings, then offer the phone number and e-mail address of the show (warning callers that in order to participate successfully they must “have a take, and that take must not suck or you will get run”), and then proceed to offer his comments on the day’s leading sports stories. It is not unusual for Rome to continue his monologue well into the second and even third segment of the program. However, Rome usually begins to take calls in the second segment of the program (immediately following the first commercial break). Interviews with athletes and sports journalists are also commonplace and feature a decidedly more serious tenor on the part of Rome and his callers. During the final half hour of a typical day of programming, Rome features “The Huge Call of the Day” and “The Huge E-mail of the Day,” isolating a single call and e-mail to the show that he deems the best that day. While callers and e-mailers win no prizes for these categories, they do receive a large measure of prestige among regular listeners of the show.

The first thing many new listeners take note of, and cannot help but to, is Rome’s language and word choice, a combination of standard English, hip-hop street slang, unintelligible noises and random, seemingly senseless references to popular culture, all bolstered by Rome’s rock-solid knowledge of sports and sports history. His delivery is fast paced, his commentary is biting and often insulting, as this transcript indicates:

“How about Fresno State laying that beat down on Kansas State?

In Manhattan. I mean you never see a Bill Snyder team get bitch

slapped like that. Much less at home, much less by somebody out

of conference. Fresno State dropping 45 on K state! Are you kidding me? After an ASS kicking like that, you know Snyder is going to ban butter from the program altogether. Soft butter, hard butter, whipped butter. Now you see why Snyder refuses to ever schedule anybody out of conference who matters. Look what happens when he does. You finally play somebody not named the DeVry institute and you get hammered. (9/14/04)

Rome's monologues set the agenda, tone, and performance standards for subsequent callers. The agenda is sometimes hyper-critical, the tone is often sarcastic and the performance standards are guided by that agenda and tone.

The Jim Rome Show is a modern day rhetorical forum named and enacted by Rome and his callers. Rome refers to his program as "The Jungle," a label that can be read in numerous ways: wild, dangerous, open, exotic. As a rhetorical space, however, "The Jungle" ("It's a jungle out there") best captures the daily competition for Rome's attention and praise. Callers to Rome's show compete to first make it to the air, then stay on the air, and ultimately have their call "racked" (set aside on tape to be considered later in the show as the "Huge Call of the Day.") His listeners are referred to both by Rome and one another as "Clones," a moniker given because successful callers mimic Rome's style and content.

After almost eight years of listening and a full week of taping and transcription of the show, I have identified four "through lines," typical subject matter, attitudes, and language employed by Rome.

1) Rome's sarcastic derision of his listeners is a staple of the show. He stereotypes the "clones" as unemployed, pathetic losers who continue to live with their parents well into middle age and have absolutely no ambition. This subtext ultimately led to some of Rome's fans creating the website "LiveWithMom.com."

2) Rome's loyalty to his southern California roots leads him constantly to chide the people and sports teams of northern California, particularly the San Francisco bay area. It is not uncommon for Rome and his clones to call people from northern California "water hoarders" for not sharing their water with their neighbors in the south or "battery chuckers" for the local fans penchant for throwing hard objects, including alkaline batteries, at opposing players from the Los Angeles area during games.

3) Rome's constant attacks on sports figures and celebrities who run afoul of the law is a third staple. For nearly four full years after O.J. Simpson was accused of killing his former wife and a waiter, Rome and his callers mercilessly derided Simpson in innumerable ways. Rome often references his mythical "Celebrity Drunk Bus" as a preferred alternative to drunk driving that celebrities always seem to forget. When former University of Michigan head football coach Gary Moeller was arrested for drunk driving several years ago, Jim Rome was extremely vocal in his criticism of him. That arrest prompted the creation of a new verb on Rome's show – *Moeller* or past tense, *Moellered*, the act of getting drunk (Rome often describes being intoxicated as being "Moellered-up"). During the week I taped the show, it was revealed that actress Tracey Gold, who played Carol Seaver in the ABC comedy *Growing Pains*, was arrested for drunk driving. Rome turned her arrest into material for his show.

4) The concept of “Jungle Karma” is a frame that enables Rome to claim magical causes and effects. For years, Rome has advanced the legend that athletes who appear as guests on the show are destined that week to have tremendous success in their games. Guests who cancel scheduled appearances are destined to fail miserably. This “karma” is as legendary to callers as the purported legends of the *Sports Illustrated* cover curse or the somewhat more modern Campbell’s Chunky Soup advertising curse.

These through-lines create and name Jim Rome’s persona, audience, agenda, and power. *The Jim Rome Show* fulfills Farrell’s (1993) definition of a rhetorical forum. It acts as a space for multiple positions, which range from support for or derision of teams and athletes to attacks on fellow listeners. It contains more than a decade of rhetorical precedent and relies on audience knowledge of that precedent (and on at least a small degree of cultural literacy) to guide the agendas and constituencies brought forth by and through the program as a whole.

The concept of forum, however, didn’t completely account for my own attraction to the show. What I began to notice after several months of listening was that one factor above all others made me want to tune in day after day – the repeated subtle references to history, popular culture, music, movies and politics that both Rome and his callers would weave into their monologues each day to punctuate (humorously, more often than not) their opinions on sports. Such complex weavings, I maintain, deserve critical attention as rhetorical action taken in a rhetorical space.

The Jim Rome Show’s Intertextuality

The best way to account for the complex weavings, formulas, and references in the content and structure of *The Jim Rome Show* is through the post-structuralist concept

of intertextuality. As noted by Ott and Walter (2000), media critics in the early 1980's began to take note of two important things. First, audiences can be viewed as active agents in creating meaning, rather than simply passive consumers of media; and second, movie and television programs increasingly contained content that made references to *other* areas of popular culture. Academic works (Campbell & Freed 1993; Collins 1992) along with popular articles (Bark 1998, Griffin 1998), used the term "intertextuality" to describe the phenomenon. It should be noted that the use of intertextuality should not be viewed as something that was "born" in the early 1980's. For example, Brummett (1994) notes that during his heyday in the 1950's and 1960's Martin Luther King "wove into a speech many brief passages from the Bible, proverbs, maxims and his other speeches" (p. 151).

Also at that time, a controversy arose regarding how various writers began using the term somewhat differently, as either an audience-centered descriptor or an author-centered one. Literary theorists, such as Barthes (1988), supported the argument for the audience. Barthes, who throughout his career stressed that the unity of a text lies not in its origin [author] but in its destination [audience], wrote, "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture... [and is] made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entertaining into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, and contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author" (pp. 146, 148).

Fiske (1987) conceptualized a theory of intertextuality which "proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it. These relations do not take the form of specific

allusions from one text to another and there is no need for readers to be familiar with specific texts to read intertextually” (p. 108). Collins (1992) suggests that intertextuality is used consciously and strategically by writers and producers of media content as an invitation to a particular audience response. For example, in 1990, when actor A Martinez left NBC’s daytime drama *Santa Barbara* to join the cast of that same network’s prime time legal drama *L.A. Law*, the writers of his new show cleverly and purposely incorporated intertextuality into his very first episode. When his character, Daniel Morales, was introduced at the law firm, he was asked where he was from. When he replied “up north,” he was asked to be more specific. His reply? “Santa Barbara.” One can easily deduce that the writers of *L.A. Law* used that line to elicit a particular audience response (a quick chuckle), at least for those members of the audience familiar with his former work in daytime drama. This example underscores the importance of the creators of content.

The tug-of-war continued among authors of scholarly literature. While Suleiman (1990) defines intertextuality as “the presence, either explicit (as in direct quotation, identified as such) or implicit (as in allusion, parody, imitation) of one text in another” (p. 219), Schirato and Yell (1996) call it “the process of making sense of texts in reference to their relations with other texts” (p. 92) and as “the different cultural literacies we bring to any reading of a text” (p. 217). Ott and Walter (2000) accurately note that scholars use the term intertextuality interchangeably to describe both “the centering of the audience as a site of textual production and the expanding role of intentional allusion in media” (p. 429).

Today, the cooperative intertextuality that exists between authors and audiences continues to be used for the mutual benefit of both parties and can be viewed as both a process and a mindset. This intertextuality in media is both blatant and subtle. Prime time television, for example, contains many examples of blatant intertextuality. On April 27, 1998, producer David E. Kelly brought the worlds of two of his programs, *Ally McBeal* and *The Practice*, together. On that night, on two separate networks (FOX and ABC), the characters of both programs appeared together on one another's shows in back-to-back episodes with the same storyline. Later that same year, there was a more subtle intertextuality involving characters of both shows. In an episode of *Ally McBeal* entitled "Making Spirits Bright," the title character, played by Calista Flockhart, runs into a character from *The Practice*, attorney Helen Grable played by actress Lara Flynn Boyle. During much of 1998, both Flockhart and Boyle had been the subjects of pervasive scrutiny by the media for their perceived unhealthy low body weight. In a clever intertextual retort, Ally and Helen bump into one another in an office. As the camera pans back, Helen sarcastically tells Ally she was "just admiring your outfit" and adds "Maybe you should eat a cookie." Ally's equally sarcastic reply? "Maybe we should share it!" Numerous other programs, such as the multiple incarnations of the crime drama franchises *CSI* (CBS) and *Law and Order* (NBC), have incorporated much in the way of blatant crossover. FOX's long running animated series *The Simpsons* and Comedy Central's cartoon *South Park* are perhaps the most legendary shows in television history when it comes to using clever, subtle references to popular culture and media in their storylines.

ESPN television's *SportsCenter*, the network's signature news-style program of scores, highlights, wrap-ups and interviews, provides us with a sports-centered example of how intertextuality has found a permanent place in sports culture. The programs hosts have themselves become entertainment figures, in part, because of the way they borrow liberally from popular culture during their time on the air. When anchor Linda Cohn describes a basketball player faking left and driving right as "shaking it like a Polaroid picture" (a reference to the hip-hop group Outkast's lyric in their song "Hey Ya"), or when anchor Steve Berthiaume punctuates his description of a home run highlight by donning a Cuban accent and yelling character Tony Montana's oft repeated line from Brian DePalma's *Scarface*, "Say hello to my little friend!," it's obvious intertextuality is a common device in the production of texts and audience.

Intertextuality on the Jim Rome Show is very much about a series of layerings of references to sporting events, popular culture, news items, celebrity, and understanding the in-house jargon of the show. Indeed, the listener must be an astute and up-to-date cultural consumer to understand just how complex this layering this, as demonstrated in the following transcript and my "translation" of it.

JR: Let's go to Jay in Providence. Back to the phones. Hey Jay, what's up?

J: Nothin' much, Rome, you know, we're on the heels of another Sox/Yankees series this weekend, last thing I really needed to see this week was a, uh, another Jeff Nelson/Karim Garica flashback to last year. And, I mean, the Frank Francisco thing, it's disgusting, I mean, they always say that things are better in Texas and now you

can say the A-holes are even bigger in Texas now. I mean, this is one of the most disgusting things I've seen in recent years. And while I was nice to see that the dude did get a little jail time, but, I don't know if that's enough. I mean, Selig, his approval, it's raising. He's been preaching parity all season long. But remember, he did blow the whole steroid scandal investigations and I'm curious to see how he's gonna have this thing play out. 'Cause I mean, we also have Todd Bertuzzi, he got suspended for the rest of the season and personally, I think this is a lot worse than the Bertuzzi case and this guy should be tossed out of baseball if not given the rest of the season off. I mean baseball is America's pastime, uh, baseball players they are role models for the children this is, this is disgusting and this is the last thing anyone needs to see. Uh, in regards to the Cubs, I know the Lizard's taking off the gloves now and he wants to get his team's back for all the heat they've been getting. But I think, uh, the Lizard needs to go out and check himself, check the team and speaking of checking yourself, Nomar, I understand that you do have to consult your wife in your decisions. We're glad you're out of Boston. But why don't you go ask Skirt Warner and how that went when Marcy D'Arcy went to bat for him and started making all his decisions. And the one last thing I got real quick is if a tree falls in the woods and no one's there, does it really make a sound? That's the

question I got about the NHL. If no one watches NHL hockey and there's not a season next season, does anyone really care? War Johan Santana the AL Cy Young and the MVP, war no more countdown to the world series of poker, war the Friday morning hangover. I'm out!

JR: Rack him! Good job, Jay! That's tight! (9/15/04)

Even a cursory understanding of this transcript is impossible without understanding the dense background of sports, personalities, events, histories, and even spouses, that fund the content of this call. Jay's call is packed with references to Major League Baseball (including Chicago Cubs manager Dusty Baker solely by his nickname, The Lizard, Commissioner Bud Selig solely by his last name and the Garciparra/Hamm marriage), the National Hockey League (Vancouver Canucks player Todd Bertuzzi was suspended for the remainder of the 2003-2004 season for a violent check against an opponent, while the 2004-2005 season was stalled during a labor dispute), ESPN television (a job at the network for showing a countdown clock all day leading up to their broadcast of The World Series of Poker), weeknight binge drinking and even a reference to actress Amanda Barse. Barse played the character Marcy D'Arcy on the classic FOX situation comedy *Married With Children* and bears a resemblance to Brenda Warner, the wife of New York Giants quarterback Kurt Warner (who becomes feminized by Jay by being referred to as "Skirt" Warner). Brenda Warner, who at one time had her own weekly talk radio show in St. Louis, was vilified by the press in 2003 for appearing on numerous sports talk radio shows and blasting Rams head coach Mike Martz for not giving her husband more playing time.

Jay also made use of one of the Rome show's most repeated forms of intertextuality by closing his call with phrases beginning with the word "War." The War _____ reference is a longstanding play on the Auburn University sports battle cry "War Eagle!" On the Rome show, seasoned listeners know the phrase is often used as a verb...to "war" something is to advance its cause, to promote and advocate it in both serious and sarcastic ways.

The Jim Rome Show provides an excellent text which allows for moving beyond the *presence* of intertextuality, to explore *how* intertextuality functions. If the author and the audience are equally important in the creation and management of meaning, then as Ott and Walter (2000) note, intertextuality is "a valuable theoretical tool" which "stands to aid media scholars in their quest to understand the complex interaction of author, text and audience. It expands the way critics think of the practice of reading, and enhances understanding of postmodern popular culture and its role in the social world" (p. 442). As helpful as those observations are, no critic has gone beyond endorsing intertextuality as a construct to exploring how intertextuality operates in specific cultural performances. My close reading of the transcripts of one-week of broadcasts of the Jim Rome Show reveals that intertextuality operates in three overlapping and interdependent ways: 1) as performance competence, 2) as social identification, and 3) as social critique. Successful callers carefully enact each of these functions in formulaic and strategic ways. Unsuccessful callers, however, fail at each, in turn evoking and enduring the wrath of Jim Rome and his audience.

Intertextuality and Performance Competence

The Jim Rome Show is just that—a show—with a complex mixture of performers, audience, and emergent texts that constitute the show. Richard Bauman (1984) maintains there are three elements that are constitutive of all performance: 1) the performer must display competence, 2) the performer is subject to and the audience is accountable for evaluating the performance, and 3) heightened experience is available in and through performance. All three elements of performance are operating—with a vengeance—each day on *The Jim Rome Show*.

First, performance competence is the notion that a performer—any performer—must understand and enact the codes and conventions of a genre of performance, “above and beyond the referential content” of the performance (Bauman 1984, p. 11). A first-grader, for example, quickly learns the codes and conventions of performing the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag: standing, hand on heart, facing the flag. Learning the “referential content,” knowing and saying the words appropriately, often comes during and as a part of the learning competency curve. Second, all performers are subject to evaluation by the audience; the ways and means of that evaluation vary across culture, community, history, and individual performance, but “evaluation” as a constitutive element is a constant. Third, heightened experience, again defined differently across cultures, communities, histories, and performances, is always a potential in performance—for performers and audiences. Given those constitutive elements, performance is emergent: “The emergent quality of performance resides in the interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of the participants, within the context of particular situations” (p. 38).

The Jim Rome Show is a performance genre that demands displays of competence, renders swift and clear evaluation, and makes heightened experiences available to its community. Intertextuality is part and parcel of each of these elements.

First, the performance competencies enacted on the show include being able to utilize at least two of the following six call content strategies: 1) expressions of gratitude toward Rome which sometimes turn openly solicitous, 2) at least one reference to current events, 3) at least one reference to the show's own formulaic phrases, themes, or "referential content" 4) defense of your home turf and/or favorite team/athlete, 5) derision of someone else's home turf and/or favorite team/player, 6) The use of the phrase "War ____" to make one final serious or sarcastic commentary before closing and 7) a "cloned" form of leave-taking at the end of the call (mostly the use of the phrase "I'm out!," although "good night now" would be an acceptable alternative).

By way of example, this call from Joey in New Bedford successfully performs all seven competencies:

JR: Let's go to Joey! New Bedford! First stop today. Hey Joey, what's up?

J: Rome, to borrow a line, Romey, what's up, bro?

JR: What's up?! What's up?!

J: How you doin'?

JR: I'm great! How about you, Joey?

J: Good, hey, Tiger Woods is killin' me, man. Every week I have his back! He's makin' me look bad still! I hope he doesn't like his chances anymore. Did you catch that interview he had with Jack,

uh, regarding Jack Nicklaus a couple days ago? I guess he asked the media if they knew what his Ryder Cup record was? I don't know what it is either. I know what Tiger's is, what it is and it SUCKS! Anyway, on to, uh, Oscar de la Hoya this weekend. I think he's gonna bring it. I think he's got a big win comin' and if Hopkins doesn't know, he's gonna find out, 'cause De la Hoya is gonna send him a CD. One of the tracks on it is "You Don't Know Me," it's just in Spanish. Sox/Yankees this weekend. I'm gonna borrow one more line from somebody, "Make the world a better place, punch a Yankee fan in the face." That's Schmitty in Fall River. Uh, war Providence tour stop, eventually. War Memo in the 310, Crackberry Crew and The Mom. War T minus 29 days to TS 34, baby. Rome if we have a party for The Mom are you checking in? Late!

JR: Alright, Joe. You got it! We'll see. Never say never. (9/17/04)

This quick call to Rome's show also successfully followed accepted show formula. After welcoming Joey to the show, Joey greets Rome by borrowing a line from legendary caller "Silk in Huntington Beach" (though Silk usually pronounces "bro" as "bra"), indicating immediately that he is "down" with the show's caller protocol and appreciates being allowed on the air. His call proceeds to reference current and upcoming events such as the Ryder Cup and impending Oscar de la Hoya/Bernard Hopkins boxing match. Joey successfully weaves in references to the show's fan website LiveWithMom.com, as well as the upcoming tour stop indicating more knowledge of

referential content. He saves his most pointed comments for last, blasting the New York Yankees and taking up for his team, the Boston Red Sox at what was a critical time in the season. Finally, he “wars” the idea of a tour stop in his home market and some regular contributors to LiveWithMom.com and takes leave with the word “late,” homage once again to Silk who uses the phrase often at the end of his calls. Rome is pleased with the call, and even though it was not “racked” it made a solid impression and was demonstrated the caller’s rhetorical ability to contribute effectively to the show.

Second, the evaluation techniques are dictated by the host himself and are multi-layered. Obviously anything which may end violating FCC regulations would be grounds for immediate termination and rejection of the call. Beyond that, any caller who makes it obvious that his/her call is in any way rehearsed, written down or pre-recorded will also be doomed to fail. Delivery plays an additional role. Any caller who pauses for too long, uses vocalized pauses repeatedly, or has poor grasp of pronunciation, can expect to be run from the show and ridiculed. However, callers who can weave at least two of the strategies listed above together with references to current and classic popular culture can expect high praise from both Rome and the listeners. Typical phrases of praise from Rome include, “excellent” and “that’s tight,” but the highest form of recognition comes with the phrase “Rack him!” (or “Rack her!”) when it is made known that Rome considers the call to be one of the best of the day and, with that exclamation, alerts his staff that the call is to be made available on tape for possible playback at the end of the program.

If a caller stumbles verbally, uses racist or profane language, or is perceived by Rome as having an opinion unworthy of air, Rome is quick to “run” the caller from the

show. When a caller is “run” from the show, he or she is usually cut off in mid-sentence by the sound of a loud buzzer, similar to the one heard at basketball games. Several times a year, Rome treats long time listeners of the show to one of his favorite pranks involving the use of that buzzer. One of the rules of the road when it comes to Rome’s show is that you wait your turn to speak to him on the air. Bill in Tampa, for example, begins his call this way:

JR: Let’s go to the phones. We go to Bill in Tampa! You made it in, Bill! Good job! Nice to have you. What’s up?

B: Jim, thanks for the vine. Waiting after 2 hours here to talk to you, man.

Note that Bill thanks Rome for “the vine.” That veiled reference to Tarzan’s preferred method of transportation through the jungle becomes a metaphor for symbolic navigation of this jungle of the airwaves.

Numerous times a year, callers plead with Rome’s call screener to be placed on the air immediately, feeling certain that they have what it takes to get their calls “racked”. According to Rome himself, all calls to the show are screened by staffers, but Rome makes the final decision whether or not to actually put the caller on the air. Like many other talk radio hosts, Rome views a computer screen that lists the name and hometown of the caller along with a brief synopsis of what that caller told the screener he/she wants to discuss. Rome’s setup for these moments is usually the same each time. Knowing the caller can hear him, he enthusiastically tells his audience that a caller is on the line who is sure he/she has something earth-shattering to say that is guaranteed to get racked (or in some versions, a caller tells the screener he/she has an important meeting or class to

attend and cannot wait that long). Rome then puts the caller on the air just long enough to thank him before the buzzer sounds and Rome sarcastically apologizes for their untimely demise. It's an inside joke that longtime listeners never grow weary of.

Third, heightened experience, or the “specialness” that attends to performance, is very much about audiences and performers enjoying the experience of listening and appreciating the wit, sarcasm, and cultural critique available on and through the show. The markings of “heightened experience,” throughout the transcripts, find numerous references to the upcoming tour stop, which so many fans of the show see as the ultimate community event celebrating everything they hold dear to them as both sports fans and fans of the show.

Psychiatric crisis counselor John Karliak, known by Clones as “John in C-town,” is perhaps Jim Rome’s biggest advocate and self-described “guardian of the jungle.” Karliak gained fame on the show after complaining to his local affiliate’s general manager when Rome’s show was pre-empted by a NASCAR event. The general manager was so impressed by Karliak’s passion in defense of the show, that he invited him to lunch. The event is now known in show lore as “lunch with the monkey.” In the middle of his tirade, John in C-town offers an incredibly sharp commentary on the “specialness” available in and through *The Jim Rome Show*, especially when the show spills over into tours that bring virtual audiences together as “real” audiences in their communities:

A tour stop is about clones getting together, celebrating the jungle,
what you do for us, 15 hours a week! We listen as we trudge
through our lives. You entertain us, you make us laugh, and we're

all sports fans. And for one day, for about 3 hours, all we want to do is get together somewhere in the U.S. and celebrate it. (9/16/04)

This quote from John's call summarizes the feelings of so many regular listeners to the show. For them, listening to the show is merely an entrée into what it means to be a member of this community. It is about that sense of identification, of being not just a sports fan but a sports fan *in communion* with other fans of the show, who speak, in a sense, their own language and view sports and the world through that larger intertextual lens. When I attended Rome's January 2000 tour stop in Tampa, I felt that sense of both community and appreciation. When Rome took the stage that night (to the familiar sounds of a bell and his opening theme music, *Lust for Life*), the ovation was as loud or louder than any rock concert welcome.

While sports fans today have multiple outlets for their opinions to reach an audience, radio adds a critical dimension, the sound of a caller's voice. It is the sound of that voice, with its inflection, volume, and accents, that gives an intimate, personal dimension to the words and opinions expressed. It provides an ingredient that nothing in print form can and in many ways, acts performatively to establish and promote identity on the show. To regular listeners to and callers of *The Jim Rome Show*, performance competence is tied largely to the ability of callers to employ intertextuality into their calls (performances). In short, employing intertextuality, especially in a sarcastic, comedic sense, is the recognized code of the show's followers. The ability to employ it well, especially by weaving established show lore and stereotypes into one's "takes," is what separates average callers from show "legends." It is what also turns a simple caller to a radio program into a "character" with a continuous "role" on this program.

Intertextuality and Social Identification

Sports are a microcosm for life. When we participate either as a players or fans, we live out life lessons about winning and losing, about doing your best and yet not being good enough, about how working hard and playing by the rules sometimes isn't enough to overcome those who cheat and take shortcuts and win because of it. However, it must be noted that in the world of sports, the player and the fan are two entirely separate entities. The focus of this study is decidedly not about athletes. It is about fans and how sports talk radio is a rhetorical forum for producing that social identity. Authors such as Roberts (1976) and Goldstein (1979) have illustrated just how deeply rooted sports fandom is in American culture, but as Cialdini (1993) notes, "The relationship between sport and the earnest fan is anything but gamelike. It is serious, intense and highly personal" (p. 195). The word "fan," of course, is a shortened form of the word "fanatic" and judging by how television cameras so often capture images of game attendees dressed as Elvis Presley or wearing face paint and yelling at the top of their lungs, Americans are fanatical about their teams. The Professional Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio even has a display dedicated to the best individual fans of each team every year. Think about it. *You* could make it to the hall of fame without ever playing one down of football.

As Jenkins (1992) points out, "Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it" (p. 86). In the case of sports, however, fandom's "institution of theory

and criticism” is very much about strategies employed by individuals to produce social identifications—with individual players, with teams, with towns, with regions, with nations. The Olympic Games, no doubt, for most Americans transcends smaller geographies. For Kenneth Burke, identification works on two basic principles: consubstantiality and division. In “acting together,” Burke claims, “men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (Rhetoric of Motives, p. 21). Ironically, such togetherness is a product of division:

The Rhetoric [of Motives] . . . considers the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another.

Why “at odds,” you may ask, when the titular term is “identification”?

Because, to begin with “identification” is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of *division*. . . . Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. (p. 20).

Claims to consubstantiality in sports are very much about finding common ground, and those commonalities are secured through claiming one’s differences from others. Asimov (1975), writing about how people reacted to competitions they watched, said, “All things being equal, you root for your own sex, your own culture, your own locality . . . and what you want to prove is that *you* are better than the other person. Whomever you root for represents *you*; and when he wins, *you* win” (p. 11).

On the Jim Rome Show, common ground is most often established geographically through naming. Place names imply geographic region, class position, and a variety of fan behaviors associated with a particular region. The caller is not simply “John” or

“Greg” or “a caller from Columbus, Ohio.” The caller is “John from C-town” or “Greg in Vegas.” Often these callers are known for defending their hometowns as aggressively as they defend their hometown teams. One of the tactics of fellow callers is to insult someone not only on the basis of who they root for, but also for where they live. Common ground, however, is inversely established through *different* grounds. For example, this short phone call aired on *The Jim Rome Show* were much more about insulting locale rather than any particular team or player. When golf’s Ryder Cup came to Detroit, Michigan in 2004, this call was aired:

B: Uh, Romey, it’s Billy the cop from the D. Didn’t get the chance to talk to you on September 11, no all cop radio this year. Hey, Romey, it’s gonna take me a second. I’m busy putting my 3 year old in the trunk, uh, er, I mean the car seat. Um...I was just down the road from the Ryder Cup, uh, at Maple and Cranbrook, and any of you Euros that parked in the local high school down there you’re getting your rigs ganked right now. Might want to scurry back there in your kilts. That’s all I got for you, Romey. See you in Cleveland, buddy! (9/15/04)

“Different ground” here is also very much about class differences. The Ryder Cup is one of golf’s most prestigious and internationally recognized events, pitting a team of American golfers against a team made up of the best from around the world. Even though golf has begun to be appreciated by those on lower socioeconomic levels, it is still very much perceived as a game of and for the rich and privileged. It is not followed by the same kind of culturally diverse fan base as baseball and football. So Billy (who bills himself as a blue collar police officer in one of the most blue collar cities in America,

Detroit), uses this call to mock those differences and in a way galvanize the American, blue collar fans who are listening. He derides the “Euros” (established show slang for Europeans), feminizes them for wearing kilts, and suggests that his fellow police officers are ticketing and towing their illegally parked cars (“ganking their rigs”). Class and gender play a significant role in this call, working to establish both the identity of the caller and the cultural identity of the American fan, who ideally exhibits a distinct lack of pretense and snobbery.

What is ironic about this call is that since the middle of the 20th century, it has become increasingly more difficult for all sports fans to experience the sports they love in person. Professional sports was designed as entertainment for the working class. Today, experiencing a National Football League game in person is financially out of reach for most working class men and women. For example, season tickets in the middle level price range for the National Football League’s Tampa Bay Buccaneers cost nearly \$1100.00. When the prices of parking, transportation and concessions are also factored in, the cost of attending a game rises to over \$100 per person, well out of reach for most working class families. That fact has not stopped millions of fans from continuing to support the NFL from a distance. One reason is because of the regional pride and personal self esteem boost fandom engenders in so many people.

If geographies imply class identifications, then they also imply typical fan behaviors for a particular region. Also during the week I sampled Rome’s show, a brawl broke out in Oakland between players for the Texas Rangers and several fans of the hometown Oakland A’s. After pervasive heckling by fans, several Rangers players, including Rangers relief pitcher Frank Francisco, actually jumped over the wall into the

stands to fight with fans. At one point, Francisco picked up a folding metal chair and threw it in the direction of Oakland fans Craig and Jennifer Bueno. Craig Bueno managed to get out of the way. His wife Jennifer, however, was struck with the chair and suffered a broken nose. On most talk radio shows around the country, this incident elicited discussion of how players and fans have both gone too far in how they dole out and deal with trash talk. On Rome's show, it was an opportunity to reflect critically on the downside of social identification, especially Chicago fans' reputation for "craziness" as a commonality for the entire group. Roger in Chicago said:

R: Hey listen, I want to give a shout out to Oakland fan for finally making Chicago fans look reasonable. I mean for once the story doesn't start, "Crazed fan in Chicago jumps on to field, crazed fan in Chicago throws things at pitchers in bullpen, crazed fan in Chicago lifts cap off of somebody's head and players pile into the stands." 'Cause geez, we're just tired of getting piled on for being the bunch of meatballs that we are in Chicago. So thank you, Oakland fan. We really appreciate it. (9/15/04)

As much as the "Clones" enjoy identifying with the Jim Rome Show, they also do argue with each other, setting themselves apart geographically as well as contextually from each other:

S: Hey, uh, this guy from Tampa who keeps making cracks about my fiancé. It is funny and I appreciate that fact because my future mother-in-law runs an office where every guy there listens to your show so she gets to hear it too, so I appreciate that. But, I want to

tell this guy, instead of talking about me, why...shouldn't you be, like, helping people fill sandbags or something? Doing something constructive? Not to mention this whole thing about so and so needs to throw a bunch of jabs? Dude, you called Tony Bruno the, the other morning and said the same exact thing, the same exact phone call. So, my count, that's 3 days in a row you're calling saying the same thing, all different shows. I mean, is your opinion that valuable that we... that many people really need to hear it? I don't think so. Uh, bro, I think I'm gonna to back to bed. I'll talk to you later. (9/17/04)

The "guy in Tampa" Silk was referring to was "Bill in Tampa." Later in the week, the insults continued when Bill "cracked back" at Silk in this call:

B: You know, I made my debut in the jungle on Wednesday and I want to apologize to Silk. You know, I said that you got your wife from a mail order bride service. I actually meant that you went across the border and you were handing out green cards to see which one was gonna with ya!' (9/15/04)

Regional identification and insults are common on the show, from the "Battery Chuckers" of Northern California to the "Chowds" of New England. Legendary callers "Jeff in Richmond" and "Otis in Austin" with their thick southern accents are routinely derided as "necks" (short for rednecks) by fellow Clones. However personal these insults may sound, it is apparent that they are part of the performance within the show, designed as parody for comedic effect. Additionally, there is also an intertextuality component at

work here, whereby adept callers are able to immediately connect not only obvious regional stereotypes but discreet, often obscure, references to things like incidents of bad fan behavior and even long-forgotten on and off-field blunders by athletes to other points they are making in their calls. In short, social identification on *The Jim Rome Show* extends several layers beyond what general audiences are commonly used to.

Intertextuality and Social Critique

Through transcribing one week of listener calls to the Jim Rome show, it is clear that successful callers to the program are knowledgeable and prepared to make the best of the time they've been given to speak (perform). When those callers offer their best performances, it makes for what Rome calls good "smack," a slang phrase that can be loosely defined as a solid combination of sports knowledge, wit, the ability to defend your team, the ability to creatively insult others in ways which are commonly known to seasoned listeners and good humor. Once per year, usually in March or April, Rome hosts and invitation-only "Smack-Off" in which fans of the show compete for the title of "King of Smack" and, much like the lifetime exemption for winners of The Masters golf tournament, enjoy a lifetime pass to participate in future Smack-Offs. Clearly, Rome has set the stage for social critique to be highly valued on the show. Critiques the week I listened featured 1) appraisals of sports figures' performances, 2) Actress Tracy Gold's drunkenness, and 3) a running exchange of wife insulting among callers.

For Jim Rome, the sports world often acts as a springboard for social criticism of the world at large. In Rome's world, *everyone* is expected to follow the rules (both written and unwritten). But when you're a high profile athlete, entertainer or other public official and you've broken the rules, you can expect Rome to take full advantage of it and

unleash a sometimes humorous and sometimes angry diatribe against you, all for the sake of livening up the show. The tone which with he delivers this critique is usually forcefully angry, though it can come across at times as ironically humorous (Rome sometimes laughs during these rants when he can no longer contain himself). Not surprisingly, Rome's callers often follow suit with calls sometimes entirely devoid of sports content or references. Too much of this, however, is deemed in the program's etiquette to be inappropriate and Rome will often urge callers to adjust their comments to reflect more sports related themes.

Some of the more astute callers to the show will find ways to work jobs at other callers into the larger reference of their calls, while providing their opinions on sports. For example, caller "Bill in Tampa," who was also discussed previously in this chapter, wraps some insults toward a fellow caller's wife around his critique of baseball, boxing and New York Giants head coach Tom Coughlin...

JR: Let's go to the phones. We go to Bill in Tampa! You made it in, Bill! Good job! Nice to have you. What's up?

B: Jim, thanks for the vine. Waiting after 2 hours here to talk to you, man. You know, I made my debut in the jungle on Wednesday and I want to apologize to Silk. You know, I said that you got your wife from a mail order bride service. I actually meant that you went across the border and you were handing out green cards to see which one was gonna with ya! Anyway, the reason I called was to basically, you know, the fact that Johnny Damon didn't come into the jungle and he just jerked the karma means

good for the Yanks! I think we're gonna take 2 out of 3 here, especially with Arroyo and Lowe pitching. Those 2 combined have given up 42 runs in 7 outings against the Yankees. And the way that we're mashing and the way that our pitching's working right now, I believe we're gonna take 2 out of 3. I'm not lookin' for, uh, a sweep outta there. Now with the...with boxing coming up here, you, know. This fight Saturday, I said that De La Hoya is gonna need a can of mace in one hand and a baseball bat in the other to knock him out. He needs to jab at least 35 times in the fight, uh, each round in order to win it. If he does that and he keeps Hopkins off of him and doesn't let him get inside, he'll be able to win a decision. We've got some good fights comin' up here in October, we've got Trinidad and Majorga. We...in November, we've got Winky Wright and Mosley. And then we've got, uh, Eric Morales and we've got Marco Antonio Barerra the third comin' out! Memo to Lieutenant Coughlin, if you want to keep your job you better stop the Full Metal Jacket reruns. Otherwise you're gonna have a, a, Private Pyle incident happening. Memo to Jeff from Richmond. Why did you let your wife go to the A's game? You know, she needs that, you know, let's say, uh, uh, extreme makeover goin' on there. Because if she gets that medal, you know, she needs more than a new beak! That's it Jim. I'm out. (9/15/04)

Note that Bill's call contains a decidedly hyper-masculine tenor. It is important to note that masculinity, especially in the United States, is socially performed on many levels and in many ways each day. It's not surprising then that so many men choose sports talk radio as their "stage" of choice to enact and perform masculinity. The outlet is available, likable and has a built in audience of like minded men. The format of the show is inviting, almost calling out to men to jump in and prove their worthiness as men.

Exactly what constitutes masculinity is open to debate. For example, Brod (1987) contends that there is not a singular masculinity, but plural "masculinities," a sentiment echoed also by Connell (1995). Still, one can argue that Goffman's (1963) definition of the masculine ideal in the United States is as relevant today as it was over forty years ago, and likely represents the ideal held by many sports talk radio fans and fans of Rome's show. Said Goffman, "[In] an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. [...] Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior; at times he is likely to pass and at times he is likely to find himself being apologetic or aggressive concerning known about aspects of himself he knows are probably seen as undesirable (128).

Certainly on the radio, there is no way to *prove* things like race, weight, height, marital status, employment or even "a recent record in sports." However, it can be argued that by simply phoning into *The Jim Rome Show*, male callers are trying hard to *prove* every bit of that definition through performing masculinity. In a sense, they are engaging

in a “sport” and trying to establish a successful “record.” The caller becomes an athlete seeking to outperform others in terms of presenting themselves as the most masculine caller to the show. One way to critique other callers, then, is to attack their masculinity. During the week I sampled the show, it seemed that the best way to do that was to attack one another’s wives. Whereas Nomar Garciaparra was once seen as a hero to Boston sports fans, his injuries and lack of production in his final days with the Red Sox, combined with his trade to the Cubs, now makes him a target for callers like “Jay in Providence”. To knock and mock athletes like Garciaparra and Kurt Warner by attacking their masculinity and (assumed) heterosexuality helps make Jay and others like him more secure in their hegemonic masculinity. Garciaparra then goes from New England regional hero to emasculated henpecked husband, while Warner gets tagged as “Skirt,” becoming feminized and similarly emasculated by being portrayed as dominated by his “dyke” wife. To be a fan of these players then also means to be similarly un-masculine.

Moving Beyond Translation and Analysis

I could have easily chosen a more “traditional” sports talk show to represent nationally syndicated programming in this chapter. By instead choosing *The Jim Rome Show*, I believe I have given a better, more contemporary and in a sense, a more “real” picture of how sports and sports talk have evolved at the dawn of the 21st century. Rome’s show epitomizes how talk about sports has advanced well beyond the exterior statistics and games toward a deeper reflection of the *interior* experience of sports. As Farred (2000) notes, “Sport is a medium that enables people to talk about several aspects of their lives: regional identification, vicarious athletic accomplishment, race, admiration

for physical skill and prowess, gender, hopes, dreams and anticipations, ethnicity, loss and painful defeats” (p. 99).

There is a certain level of danger when one attempts to generate a singular theory about sports talk. That danger lies in first in the fact that sports talk is not one single, static discourse. Instead it is a discourse that changes day to day and sometimes several times within the same day. Second, sports talk permeates our daily lives in multiple forms and in multiple venues. Very often it is the way men relate to one another when they are strangers. During the writing of this chapter, I went for a walk around my neighborhood and encountered a man I didn't know. He appeared to be close to me in age, but different from me in the sense that he was African-American. After we exchanged pleasant but cursory greetings, I turned around and asked, “Did you see the end of that Pittsburgh game?” Immediately, the man's eyes widened and he smiled and we began a spirited retelling of our reactions to the finish of the Steelers-Jets NFL playoff game that had ended less than 20 minutes before. The conversation was punctuated with an excited tone, raised voices, increased gesturing and laughter on each of our parts and we performed, in a sense, a heightened sense of our experiences that day as football fans. For each of us, sports became the default topic of conversation; the least common conversational denominator which so many men seem to understand will connect them socially with other men, particularly when that man is a stranger.

My random interaction with this fellow sports fan lends a great deal of credibility to another point made by Farred (2000). He said, “[Sports talk] is a pervasive form of public engagement, dominating exchanges at the office, in the home, on the street, in bars, clubs, parties, to mention only a few sites – a conversation that heightens when a

major sports event is in progress or in the offing” (p. 101). As “public engagement”, intertextuality is a crucial component of this conversation. The shows principals (host, callers and audience) purposely and specifically. The Jim Rome Show utilizes intertextuality to achieve rhetorical purposes: performance competencies, social identification, and social critique. Though the concept of intertextuality is not new, these strategic uses are integral parts of the constitution of contemporary American sports culture. As Andrews (2002) points out, “Sport has meant, and continues to mean, different things in different cultural and temporal contexts. The structure and influence of sport in any given conjuncture is a product of intersecting, multi-directional lines of articulation between the forces and practices that compose the social context” (p. 116). This chapter has attempted to trace those intersections and multi-directional lines.

According to Hart (1997), “Rhetorical criticism is the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and then explaining them in a comprehensive and efficient manner” (p. 23). The complications of the rhetoric of *The Jim Rome Show*, however, are where its uniqueness can be found and appreciated.

With very few exceptions, Rome allows his callers to present a monologue once they are placed on the air. The overwhelming majority of other sports talk radio shows, including the program I will discuss in the next chapter, utilize much more in the way of caller-host dialogue and point-counterpoint banter. By allowing his callers to essentially “have the stage” in this fashion, Rome allows for a dramatic shift in rhetorical power, allowing the caller to *own* his/her words (at least temporarily) in an arena where those words can be heard on broadcast airwaves from coast to coast and worldwide through Internet streaming audio. By creating this kind of discursive space, both Rome and the

callers to the program become active agents themselves in helping to create both identifications with and against others in the social critique they offer. As Hart (1997) indicates, two of the most important functions of rhetoric are that it *unburdens* and *empowers* (pp. 15, 17). What can be seen in these callers is a desire to unburden themselves and *be* persuasive, to actively take advantage of the best outlet they can think of to get their point of view across to the audience they believe is their best target.

The above transcripts also indicate that the callers who both make it to and stay on the air with Rome exhibit several paralinguistic features in their calls. As Bauman (1977) notes, “Paralinguistic features, by their very nature, tend not to be captured in the transcribed or published versions of texts, with the exception of certain aspects of prosody in clearly poetic forms. The reader is consequently forced to rely on the incidental comments of the occasional sensitive observer who does note paralinguistic features of delivery style” (p. 19). One of the features that textualized transcripts cannot capture is the tone with which these calls are delivered. Most of the time, it is a forceful, cynical and almost mocking tone (not surprisingly, much like Rome’s tone during most of the show) that commands the respect and admiration of both the host and the fans of the show. It is certainly implied in the transcripts (by way of derisive language and put downs), but by listening to the calls themselves, one can hear and understand that the more a caller can perform a sense of almost cynical outrage, the more respect he/she can and will command. This is especially true of calls to the invitation only “Smack-off” held once a year for the most celebrated callers to the show.

What also becomes evident through examining the transcripts is that the callers, host and listening audience collectively create standards for rhetorical and performative

competence with specific regard to this show. Callers are held rhetorically accountable for the content of their calls and face consequences, both immediate and long-term, for failing to measure up to accepted standards. What all involved are hoping to share is that sense of heightened experience, whereby callers can combine interior and exterior intertextual references with references to popular culture and (of course) sports, to produce the best possible entertainment form for this community. This is why calls to the show almost universally follow the caller content strategies I listed earlier and take on the type of tone I just described. Again it is critical to point out the rhetorical significance of this community of listeners alone is responsible for both defining the rhetoric and defining what constitutes that sense of heightened experience.

Still, there is the question of *why* these modern day fans feel that urgent desire to perform, to subject themselves to evaluation, to participate in this rhetorical forum that actively creates community by division. The role of sports in creating and perpetuating both hegemonic and complicit masculinity must be one part of an answer. In his social history of masculinity in the United States, Michael Kimmel describes baseball (at the turn of the century) in a way that captures much of its masculine characteristics:

Baseball was good for men's bodies and souls, imperative for the health and moral fiber of the body social. From pulpits and advice manuals the virtues of baseballs were sounded. Those virtues stressed, on the surface, autonomy and aggressive independence—but the game also required obedience, self-sacrifice, discipline, and hierarchy. Baseball's version of masculinity thus cut with a contradictory edge: If the masculinity expressed on the baseball field was exuberant, fiercely competitive, and

wildly aggressive, it was so only in a controlled and orderly arena, closely supervised by powerful adults. (1996, p. 140)

Today, in a sense, *The Jim Rome Show* has become that controlled and orderly arena, but you don't need to be a baseball player to participate. Today, anyone with a phone who knows the rules of the road for the show can become a competitor. That includes women, who often provide material which takes men to task for their overblown performances of hegemonic masculinity, allowing for a sense of balance. Still, this arena is obviously and overtly a male locale. The host himself becomes the powerful adult controlling the arena and demands obedience (by referring to loyal listeners as "clones," Rome advances an expectation that what *they* say during the show must, in almost all ways, parrot not only his language choices but his mindset), self-sacrifice (waiting on hold literally for hours before participating), discipline ("have a take, don't suck or get run" is the mantra of the show) and hierarchy (sure, anyone can call but only the best callers get invited to participate in the annual contest to become "King of Smack" and be revered as a "legend"). Of course, to be recognized as a successful caller one must assert an aggressive, independent brand of sports knowledge and social critique.

A second part of the answer may have its roots in our media-saturated world, specifically the world of the visual media. Since the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the events of the days that followed, where the same images were replayed over and over again for an audience glued to their television sets, and most especially since the birth of CNN at the dawn of the 1980's, it can be said that audiences have, in effect, *placed* themselves psychologically into the news and sporting events that have shaped our lives. Or, differently said, visual technologies constitute viewers, and the view

is in the thick of it. As De Zengotita (2005) explains it, that psychological placement is a consequence of “Reams of coverage, endless coverage, amazing coverage – in a way *more* compelling than if you had been there physically, because virtually, you were there from so many different perspectives. You weren’t in one spot...; you were everywhere there, because that amazing coverage put you everywhere there, and more or less simultaneously to boot. You had sort of a God’s eye view” (p. 7).

What follows that experience, then, is a rhetorical after-effect, the immediate desire to give voice to that emotional experience. What follows this unburdening is a sense of empowerment, and it makes no difference whether that power is real or imagined. By simply feeling that sense of empowerment, callers and listeners undergo a sort of evolution, continuing to strengthen their selves, their communities, their teams, and Jim Rome’s show—enjoying both the God’s eye view and the voice of God—disembodied, critical, and full of portent. “The voice of God,” is always—like radio—a masculine voice, isn’t it?

Chapter Four

Local Sports Talk Radio as Rhetorical Forum

Let me root, root, root for the home team

If they don't win it's a shame

- From "Take Me Out to The Ballgame"

In my hometown of Gloversville, New York, I grew up in a community peppered with large backyards, city parks, and wide open spaces. My brother, my friends, and I often roamed these spaces with baseball equipment. We played baseball first with Wiffle Ball sets and eventually grew into the standard equipment of the time: wooden bats made at the nearby Adirondack bat factory and hardballs. For most of us, especially Italian-Americans, that standard equipment also included a New York Yankees baseball cap. It was the first piece of clothing I remember cherishing.

I wore it every where my parents and teachers would allow me, including family trips to Washington, DC and deep sea fishing expeditions with my grandfather to Gloucester, MA. Wearing my Yankees cap in Gloucester was especially dangerous: Gloucester is populated overwhelmingly by New York-hating members of Red Sox Nation. Even at the age of ten, I knew that I was sending multiple messages by wearing my cap. I was a Yankee fan, I was from New York, I was Italian-American and I belonged, really belonged, to these communities that one embroidered logo on a cap had

come to signify. Such “signifying” practices, in Gloucester, could be considered fighting words.

Today, many high profile people have come to understand the power of sports apparel to make statements about identity and community. In the days following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani clothed himself alternately in the logos of the New York Police Department, the Fire Department of New York, the Port Authority Police Department and the New York Yankees. The day after the Boston Red Sox won the World Series in 2004, Democratic Presidential candidate and Massachusetts Senator John Kerry prominently wore a Red Sox cap at his campaign stops. Throughout the 2004 World Series, Kerry’s daughter Vanessa would campaign with her father sporting the words GO RED SOX written with black marker in large, bold lettering on her forearms. Film director Spike Lee is often seen in public wearing a New York Knicks jersey, and several members of the hip-hop and rap community, including Jay-Z, Sean “P. Diddy” Combs and Xzibit, have made retro or “throwback” sports jerseys popular. Over the past decade, NASCAR apparel has become nearly as popular as traditional football and baseball apparel, especially with NASCAR’s traditional Southern fan base.

Wearing your favorite team’s apparel has always been an outward, public statement of your connection with that team, but that statement is wordless. For today’s fan, sports talk radio has literally allowed fans to have a public voice in regard to how they feel and what they know about the teams, players, leagues and issues that make up the sporting world. Nearly 500 traditional “terrestrial” radio stations in the United States

have formatted their stations exclusively around sports, and both XM and Sirius satellite radio also offer sports talk programming.

When sports talk radio switches its focus from national audiences to local audiences, the rhetorical forum is radically altered, and the rhetorical forms follow suit. While the social functions of sports talk radio remain largely the same in locally produced programming as they are in nationally syndicated shows, both the audience and the flavor of the discourse change substantially. Put simply, the topics become more discreet, focusing largely on the teams, athletes, and events that call one specific place their home. But when one listens carefully with a critical ear, one can also deduce that the conversations that take place on these programs go a long way toward *defining* both individuals and communities both locally and nationally.

When it comes to the relationship between sports and society, local sports talk radio is first about negotiating and defining communities: beginning with the actions of the players on the teams representing those local areas and continuing with the on-air debate that makes up the bulk of local sports talk radio content. It can be argued that, from there, local sports talk provides a unique rhetorical avenue for social identification and definition, coordinating the management of not only what it means to be a *fan* of the teams of a local market, but more broadly what it means to be a person who makes his or her *life* in that particular locale.

Purpose of This Chapter

While the previous chapter focused on performance competencies, social identification, and social critique enacted on Jim Rome's national "stage," this chapter moves to the smaller "stage" of Tampa, Florida and *The Steve Duemig Show*. If Jim

Rome is Broadway, Steve Duemig is community theater. While the medium is the same, the performances, audiences, and rhetorical strategies are very different. This chapter argues that the central social function of *The Steve Duemig Show* is not social identification or critique but a form of pedagogy enacted through the “coaching” of the host and the resultant team building that results among listeners. As a local rhetorical forum, the performances are constant negotiations of community, helping to teach what it means to be a “real” or “true sports town.” In an effort to put textual analysis of rhetoric into conversation with this social function of rhetoric, this chapter will examine transcripts of listener phone calls made to *The Steve Duemig Show*, a local sports talk program in Tampa, FL, during the broadcasts of September 13-17, 2004. The programming aired during that week was typical of the show, overwhelmingly featuring interactions between the host and callers.

The Steve Duemig Show is in many ways the quintessential local sports talk radio show and may well be one of the best representative examples of local sports talk radio anywhere in the United States. During the week I recorded the program, the following local sports news was foremost on the minds of the host and callers:

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers losing the opening game of the 2004 regular season on the road 16-10 to the Washington Redskins. Among the “low-lights” for Buc fans were a 64 yard run from scrimmage for a touchdown by Redskins running back Clinton Portis and a groin strain suffered by newly acquired wide receiver Joey Galloway that would sideline him for most of the 2004 season. The loss prompted fans to begin to seriously question the playing ability of veteran quarterback Brad

Johnson and the ability of head coach Jon Gruden to win with the roster he and general manager Bruce Allen had crafted in the off-season.

The contract holdout by Buccaneers wide receiver Keenan McCardell, viewed by many fans as a selfish and arrogant move on the part of a good, but aging player.

The very real threat of the National Hockey League shutting down the 2004-2005 season due to a protracted labor dispute between the league and the players union. The Tampa Bay Lightning won the 2003-2004 Stanley Cup and many fans were concerned that the team would not be able to defend its title.

Former Buccaneers wide receiver Keyshawn Johnson, who was traded to the Dallas Cowboys in a deal that brought Galloway to the Buccaneers, going public with scathing criticism of his former team. In an interview with *Sports Illustrated* writer Jeffri Chadiha, Johnson blasted head coach Jon Gruden as “two-faced” for his decision to de-activate him for the final six games of the 2003 season. Added Johnson, "He had the nerve to ask me once why I didn't like him. I said, 'Come on, mother fucker. You know why I don't like you.' This is the same guy who dogged Tim Brown in meetings all year and then went out and signed him. Why would I want to be with a two-faced mother fucker like that?" Johnson, who is African-American, also ripped into former Bucs teammate Ronde Barber, who is also African-American, for Barber’s decision to back Gruden, saying, “Ronde Barber is an Uncle Tom. They’ll cut him one day

like they do everybody else, but he's trying to be political and kiss Gruden's butt." Johnson finished by attacking former teammate and fellow media favorite Warren Sapp, who was signed as a free agent by the Oakland Raiders. Said Johnson, "Why is he still worried about me, especially when he knows his fat ass would've taken the same kind of money if he'd been deactivated, too?"⁴

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how callers and the host of *The Steve Duemig Show* work together dialogically and conversationally to rhetorically co-construct both fan identity and a community. Unlike nationally syndicated programs which reach a broader national audience, *The Steve Duemig Show* airs only in west central Florida, and targets sports fans in the Tampa Bay region. Thus, the rhetorical dimension of this program differs greatly from *The Jim Rome Show*. As I will discuss further in this chapter, recurring themes of loyalty and commitment to both the teams and the region dominate the exchanges on the show, adding an element of "fan education" to the broadcasts. This chapter will delineate patterns unique to this local sports talk radio show in an effort to advance the notion that the programming serves to shape both identity and community.

This chapter will first introduce *The Steve Duemig Show*, including a brief history of the station on which it airs, quotations from an interview with Duemig and its typical content. The chapter then continues by illustrating how *The Steve Duemig Show* acts both rhetorically and pedagogically in a quest to define the Tampa Bay region as a "true sports town."

WDAE: Local Radio's Uphill Climb

Radio station WDAE (620 AM) is one of several AM and FM stations in Tampa owned by corporate giant Clear Channel Communications. The station's call letters are some of the most recognizable in the Tampa area. FCC records indicate the station was the second station granted a license in Florida on May 15, 1922, when the original owners, the Tampa Publishing Company, received permission to start broadcasting. By the late 1990's, Jacor Broadcasting owned the station, using WDAE's position at 1250 on the AM dial to bring their brand of sports talk to the Bay area.

All sports radio formatting in Tampa Bay in the 1990's was an extremely hard sell due to the sports history in the region. Since their inception in 1976, the National Football League's Tampa Bay Buccaneers developed a reputation nationwide as one of the worst franchises in professional sports in terms of on-field success. The Tampa area was viewed both internally and externally as a "losing town." One other station in the market, WFNS, had already tried and failed to make an all sports format work. For two decades, Tampa was the butt of jokes and insults in the national sports media, and the city and surrounding community suffered an enormous inferiority complex when it came to their association with professional sports. WDAE was in for an uphill climb.

In 1996, the station hired two men who would become their two most recognized personalities – former WFNS staffer Steve Duemig and then-WFLA television sportscaster Chris Thomas. Thomas was well known and well respected in the community and gave an instant air of credibility to the station. Thomas, who pulled double duty as both a radio and television sports broadcaster, died of cancer in February 2004. His colleagues at WDAE kept his illness a secret from listeners for several months

before Thomas died, at Thomas's request. To honor him, the station re-named its studios "The Chris Thomas Studios," and the chair once used by Thomas while he was on the air today sits in a corner adorned with pictures and mementos of Thomas's show.

WDAE later acquired the rights to air the games of the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning. To help those games and other team sports broadcasts reach a wider audience, new owner Clear Channel moved WDAE from the traditional 1250 AM frequency to a new home at 620 AM, a lower frequency which tends to travel farther when transmitted. That switch took place at 6:20 p.m. on January 14, 2000. Since then, WDAE has evolved into the most popular and highly rated sports talk station in Tampa Bay and has been singled out by Arbitron for its superior ratings growth.

Steve Duemig: Local Access and Education

On that night in 2000, the first show to air on the new frequency belonged to WDAE's Steve Duemig, known to radio audiences as "The Big Dog." Born in Pensacola, Florida and raised in Philadelphia, Duemig moved to the Tampa area in 1981 after spending 13 years as a professional golfer. His afternoon drive show on WDAE is the most highly rated local show in the market. Like many other radio personalities, Duemig has achieved his success by cultivating an audience of listeners who either like him or hate him. Those who like him often point out how knowledgeable he is about sports, especially golf and hockey, and how passionate he is about what it means to be a fan. Those who hate him often point out the caustic, bombastic, and sometimes very mean-spirited way he deals with callers with whom he disagrees. The people who run corporate radio, however, don't care why listeners are tuning in as long as they keep tuning in, and they are in record numbers. During the spring of 2004, Arbitron noted that WDAE was

one of only a handful of stations nationwide to register a top 3 ranking in their market among *all* radio stations for the coveted male age 25-54 demographic.⁵

The Steve Duemig Show airs Monday through Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. The program is occasionally pre-empted in part or in full by live sports broadcasts or athlete interview shows. Duemig's interaction with callers is almost completely different from the style of Jim Rome. Rather than letting the callers essentially present a monologue, Duemig interacts with his callers dialogically, allowing for a much more conversational tone to the program. On balance, the show also features less in the way of athlete and journalist interviews and fewer long monologues by the host (although Duemig regularly devotes his opening segment to a monologue much like Jim Rome does). This allows for much more in the way of argument and debate between host and caller, which also allows for a forum more conducive to the co-construction of fandom and community.

From the outset of this project, I knew personal interviews with sports talk radio hosts would elicit some of the best material and most unique insights into how hosts interact with and perceive their audiences. To that end, I attempted to schedule in-depth interviews with both Jim Rome and Steve Duemig. During the week prior to the 2001 Super Bowl, I gained access to the NFL's international radio broadcast center (commonly called "radio row"), which was located at the Tampa Convention Center in Tampa, FL. It was there that I had a very brief meeting with Jim Rome following his show, at which time I told him about my research and inquired as to whether he would be willing to schedule an interview with me. He suggested I contact his producer, Travis Rogers, to "set something up." After numerous attempts to contact Rogers via phone and e-mail, I received no reply. I requested the assistance of a then-head coach at my institution who

was close personal friends with Rome and a frequent guest on his show, and found that coach not only unwilling to help secure the interview, but openly hostile toward the idea of me even asking for his help. Shortly thereafter, I discontinued my efforts to personally interview Jim Rome.

Perhaps not surprisingly, my efforts to interview Steve Duemig were an almost polar opposite experience. Although I had friends and associates who worked for Clear Channel Communications, the owner of WDAE, I only needed to place one phone call to Duemig's producer, Jerry Petuck, and the process moved swiftly from there. Petuck gave me Duemig's direct e-mail address which I used to request an interview. Within 24 hours, Duemig responded and within one week, the interview took place.

Having direct access to Steve Duemig (and not having direct access to Jim Rome) says much about this project as a whole. To someone like Jim Rome, I may be viewed as one distant listener in a sea of millions who has a unique academic interest in his program, but someone who is not worth assisting directly. That sentiment should not necessarily reflect negatively on Rome, but instead reflect the reality that access to national broadcast celebrities is not something easy to acquire. To Steve Duemig, however, it can be argued that I am viewed as a member of his *community* (both on-air and local), someone to whom he reaches out to daily with a direct and immediate effect close to home. The opportunity to speak directly with Duemig allowed me to ask him specifically about his rhetorical intents and how he constructs his rhetorical forum. With this information and the show transcripts, I was able to examine his programming from a point of view uniquely different from that of Jim Rome's show.

I interviewed Steve Dueming in early 2005, and he provided me with some unique insights into local sports talk radio from the points of view of both fans and sports radio personalities. For fans, Dueming sees sports talk radio as a relatively new and more public outlet for people to express their opinions about sports instead of sharing their views “at the bars or at the 19th hole in the locker rooms.” For sports radio personalities, Dueming sees the format as a unique opportunity to discuss sports in depth and without time constraints, allowing for air personalities to develop a unique identity and rapport with their audience. To that end, Dueming is not afraid of keeping a good caller on the air for an entire segment, which can run between 8 and 10 minutes, a practice considered by most radio station general managers to be seriously detrimental. Dueming told me he was proud of the fact that WDAE management has never once complained about that practice, or any other aspect of his program.

Duemig also pointed out that a clear “line of demarcation is set national versus local” when it comes to the delivery of sports talk to an audience. He gave credit to nationally syndicated hosts like Tony Bruno and Dan Patrick, but leveled criticism against industry leader Jim Rome for what Dueming perceives as too much “local” content in a nationally aired program. Said Dueming, “He’s a national radio talk show host who does a lot of L.A. conversation. But he doesn’t speak to just L.A. The true professionals, I think, like a [Tony] Bruno, like a Dan Patrick, they know they’re national. Rome goes national as well, but it seems like there’s a lot of L.A. talk in [his show].”

It is clear that Dueming’s passion for sports is equal to his passion for building the Tampa community into a respected sports town. One of the moments that made a strong impression on me during my interview with Dueming was when he discussed what he

perceives as his role in moving Tampa and the surrounding area in the direction of being viewed as a true “big sports town.” Duemig’s own words help illustrate that he also perceives his duties on the show to have a pedagogical application...:

“Personally, I’ve made it my own agenda to try to educate [the public] and [help Tampa] become a major league sports town. I’ve led the fight every year about not wearing another team’s jerseys into our arenas. Learn how to defend your own turf! Learn how to be a big league sports town with hockey and educate the fans so that they’re not looked at as what I call ‘Gooberville’ – it’s not a term of [stupidity], it’s a term of just allowing things to happen and saying, ‘OK.’ When Hugh Culverhouse ran the Bucs everybody would go, ‘Well at least we’ve got a team.’ No! We demand a winner! If you let an owner sit there and say, ‘Hey the fans don’t give a crap, the newspaper writers...aren’t criticizing the team...’ Now’s your chance to get the ear of the freakin’ owner and say, ‘Look, we’re not satisfied with your goddamn product right now.’ That will get their attention. That is when you become [a big sports town].”

The above comment is striking in that Duemig views himself not solely as an entertainer, but also as an educator. Through his show, he is “teaching” the area how to become better fans and in turn, helping the area gain respect around the country in terms of its sports identity. Duemig has become famous for putting new residents of Tampa on

notice that as far as he is concerned, they have only “a three year window” to convert from fans of their old teams to fans of Tampa’s teams.

My discussion with Duemig also included issues and concepts of power in sports talk radio. From the time he joined the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1994 until the time he was released in 1999, quarterback Trent Dilfer was a lightning rod for controversy among Tampa sports fans. During football season, discussion of Dilfer so dominated Duemig’s show that at one time, Duemig had to declare that discussions of Dilfer would not be tolerated past a certain point. Callers to Duemig’s show were merciless in their criticism of Dilfer, as was Duemig. “I wasn’t about to let this guy come off like he’s a good quarterback. He’s not. And he was one of the reasons the Bucs did not win when they should have won,” said Duemig during our interview. Duemig said he believes firmly, however, that general managers, owners and players listen intently to sports talk radio. When I pressed him to tell me if he believes his show actually led to Dilfer being released from the team, Duemig replied, “In part, yes. I don’t want to think that we can control who goes and who doesn’t. That’s up to the owner. That’s up to the coaching staff. If they want to [bow down] to what the public wants, they’ll do it. But I would think that they would do it from a football standpoint.” Duemig also believes his show had a hand in first the retaining and then the dismissal of Tampa Bay Lightning head coach Terry Crisp in 1997.

It is critical to Duemig that he deliver informed opinions when he is on the air. I asked him if he sees his work as journalism or entertainment. “Both,” he replied. Duemig was quick to point out that even though he is not a journalist nor has he been trained as one, he does establish rapport with players, coaches, general managers and other sports

reporters in order to unearth critical information. He is also scrupulous about keeping material delivered to him off the record private and completely confidential. Duemig's resolve was tested in 2003 when he reported on his show, based on information from confidential sources, that the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were about to be sold. Duemig was badgered constantly to reveal his sources. He never did. But during our interview, he was adamant that the information he had was accurate and given the same set of circumstances, he would report it again.

Keeping a four hour sports talk radio program going each weekday takes incredible stamina and for Duemig, making it through that four hours sometimes means incorporating non-sports related material into his program. Sometimes, stories from the world of sports lead naturally to discussions of other topics. Such was the case in January 2005, when Duemig devoted nearly an entire program to the topic of bipolar disorder after former Oakland Raiders center Barrett Robbins was shot several times during a scuffle with police in Miami Beach. The entire tenor of the show, and in effect, the station, was altered to explain what Duemig called "a topic that transcends sports." On that day, callers to Duemig's show shared narratives of how bipolar disorder had affected their marriages, careers, friendships and lives in general. The program made a significant impact on Duemig.

Every four years on Presidential election days, Duemig also departs from sports, dedicating his entire broadcast to politics. While occasional callers will discuss crossover topics (such as whether the federal government should support legislation banning anabolic steroids from use in professional sports), most of the callers on those days call to simply support or oppose a candidate. In 2004, Duemig was a vocal supporter of

President George W. Bush, joining in the chorus of other right-wing non-sports radio hosts who piled on Sen. John Kerry for what was perceived to be his inability to take decisive stands on various issues. Not surprisingly, that stance motivated listeners to call his show both to agree with him and to take issue with him, making for an entertaining broadcast on a day when most Americans are not paying much attention anyway to the world of sports.

Local Sports Fans as Academic Subjects

If sports research makes broad claims about social identification available through sports and fandom, then there is also a pocket of academic research that seeks to find specific connections between win/loss records of sports teams and behaviors of sports fans. For example, Cialdini et. al. (1976) noted that when a college or university football team wins on a weekend, that institution's students are more likely to wear that institution's identifying apparel the following Monday than they would if the team lost. The same study noted that students used the pronoun "we" more frequently when their teams won (i.e. "We won") than when their teams lost ("They lost"). Cialdini labeled this phenomenon "Basking in Reflected Glory" (or BIRGing), a way to publicly connect themselves to the success of the team.

Inspired by Cialdini, Snyder, Higgins and Stucky (1983) coined the phrase "Cutting Off Reflected Failure" (or CORFing) to describe the act of actively avoiding being connected to a losing team so as not to be looked upon personally as unsuccessful (or "a loser"). One could argue that for true fans of a team, especially the most vocal, public boosters, any attempt at CORFing would be doomed to failure. It is important to note the distinction between BIRGing, an aggressive, outward effort to boost one's public

image, and CORFing, which is essentially a passive image-defense mechanism. Field work by Snyder, Lassegard and Ford (1986) confirmed that both of these processes do exist.

Team success or failure also reaches inward to the fan's psychology. Sloan (1979) conducted research into the moods of basketball fans before and after home games and found, not surprisingly, that after victories, fans indicated high levels of personal happiness and lower levels of discouragement and anger, whereas when the team lost, the opposite was true. Schwarz, Strack, Kammer and Wagner (1987) noted that German men indicated significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their lives *after* the German national soccer team won the 1982 World Championship as opposed to *before* the game began. Hirt, Zillman, Erickson and Kennedy (1992) studied basketball fans at Indiana University and The University of Wisconsin-Madison before and after they watched live broadcasts of games. They noted, "Game outcomes significantly affected both subjects' current mood state and their state self esteem. In addition, game outcome influenced subjects estimates of not only the team's future performance but also their own future performance on a number of tasks [like motor and mental skills tests]" (p. 735).

Not surprisingly, the research above suggests that people feel better about themselves when they are associated with winning teams. The more that team wins, the deeper the association and personal connection goes, making it harder and harder for sports fans to take an active interest in other teams. For many if not most sports fans, their social identity is defined in large part by their connection with/to the teams and athletes they love. That identification with a winner is what also spawned the concept of a "fair weather" sports fan (see Becker & Suls, 1983). "Fair weather" fans are often the

target of substantial ridicule by “die hard” fans who, it can be said, have the strength of their identities threatened by these Johnny-come-lately pretenders. As Shafer (1969) noted, teams are in many ways an extension of the self, thus the success or failure of a team means the success or failure of oneself.

These cause and effect claims about sports teams and local fans, no doubt, ring true with most sports fans. But they also emphasize end products—whether final game scores or identities of fans. This research masks issues that might be part of the gradual emergence of a local fan’s identity. In short, how do we become fans of a local team? And by what rhetorical processes do fans move from fair-weather to die-hard? This chapter argues that this rhetorical process is an educational one—a fan must be taught to identify with a local team, must be schooled in the intricacies of local fandom, and must be punished and/or rewarded for performing well. This pedagogical function of local sports talk radio is evident on *The Steve Duemig Show*.

Coaching Sports Fans

Any talk of pedagogy raises questions about the relationships among students and teachers, the processes of learning, and the end of education. These relationships, processes, and ends are vastly different depending on the definition of pedagogy. The education that happens on sports talk radio might be surprisingly similar to that of critical pedagogy. Student voices are encouraged, the classroom is situated in a very public space, and critical thinking—not transfer of information—is the goal.

Critical pedagogy, coming out of neo-Marxist traditions, begins with a focus on the relationship between formal education and class, or socio-economic status (SES), the best predictor of student performance in the United States. The de rigeur citation for

contemporary critical pedagogy is Paulo Freire, whose work in Brazil continues to inspire education reformers worldwide. Freire rejects “domesticating education” that teaches students to be receptacles of knowledge (Freire, 1985). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire advocates abandoning the transmission model of education, which deposits knowledge into students, in favor of education as “transforming action,” that empowers students to “recognize their right and responsibility to take action” (Nieto, 1996, p. 319). A key concept in Freire’s work is “conscientization,” implying both critical consciousness and conscientious engagement, including activism.

When bell hooks (2003) writes of the impact of Freire’s work on her own teaching, she spends a good deal of textual time on what a “democratic educator” does *not* do: a democratic educator does not shame, dominate, or silence students. Yet only a cursory listen to the Steve Duemig show reveals that is precisely what he does.

Athletic coaches are indeed teachers. Turman (2003) contended that “coach-athlete instructional communication parallels teacher-student instructional communication” (p. 73). Turman found that over time, “athletes perceive their coaches to send increasingly controlling messages, decreasing both praise and specific guidance. But these athletes do not seem to be put off by what might seem to be negative coaching strategies. In fact, they increasingly prefer the autocratic model of coaching” (p. 82). Duemig’s often bombastic behavior on the air and his established intolerance for any fan behavior he deems unacceptable has given him the reputation for being a “my way or the highway” hyper-masculine figure, much like the stereotypical autocratic head football coach.

Part of Duemig's "coaching style" is his lack of tolerance for any diatribe that violates his "rules" of educated fans. One of Duemig's biggest rules is that fans should always look to the future, not the past. Prior to the start of the 2004 season, the Buccaneers released safety John Lynch, a future Hall of Famer and fan favorite who was drafted by the team in 1993 and played his entire career in Tampa. The decision to release Lynch prompted considerable outcry from fans. Lynch, who signed with the Denver Broncos after his release from Tampa Bay, was very much on the mind of caller "Ori" when he phoned in to the show...

SD: Let's go to Ori. Go ahead Ori.

O: Steve, what's up, man?

SD: Hey.

O: I want to thank Mr. Phillips for whiffing on a six yard touchdown run. If that was Lynch, that never happens. Know what I mean, Steve.

SD: Oh really?! Did you watch Lynch play last night?

O: (sheepishly) Yeah I did.

SD: Well then what... go ahead. Be honest. How many did he whiff? Diphead! Get outta here!! You know, if you're gonna be that narrow minded and that short sighted! Did Phillips take the wrong angle on Portis, yeah he did. But John Lynch WHIFFED four tackles last night. Please, get over it!! He plays for Denver! You know what, if Shelton Quarles doesn't over pursue, if this doesn't happen, if the...don't blame Jermaine Phillips for crying

out loud! What about the other 28 rushes where they held them to like 80 yards? Are you people that stupid already?! Are we gonna have to go through this for fifteen weeks...of your dumbass mentality?

Shaming, dominating and silencing are all present in the above call, which illustrates that Duemig cannot be described as a “democratic” educator. It can be argued that one of the reasons he is not is a sense of *urgency* on his part, a sense that time is of the essence. If local fans do not “wise up” quickly and somehow become smarter, more aware consumers of sports, the local teams will continue to lose and the region itself will continue to suffer internally as well as externally by and through the reputation of the area. The role that Duemig plays is, of course, tailor made for this genre where sports and entertainment collide and the result has been high ratings and tremendous success.

So how to account for him as an educator—when he does precisely the things that shut down libratory educational ends? bell hooks again speaks to this point: “Educators who challenge themselves to teach beyond the classroom setting, to move into the world sharing knowledge, learn a diversity of styles to convey information. This is one of the most valuable skills any teacher can acquire” (2003, 43). Rather than critical pedagogue or democratic educator, Steve Duemig’s teaching style can be viewed as the “teacher/coach” of the Tampa Bay community. The transcripts reveal five strategies Duemig employs as coach of the Tampa Bay fan community: the bombast of masculine autocrat, criticism as instruction, positive reinforcement, and coaching women differently. The fans, in turn, constantly defer to the coach. These interactions are central in the emergence of fan identity, a fan community, and a “sports town.”

Masculine Autocrat

Duemig constantly exhorts his “players” to grow into a cohesive team by acquiring the proper vocabulary and attitudes. Duemig’s goal in teaching is to raise the level of analysis, articulation, and fandom of Tampa Bay’s community of fans to that “established” sports towns like New York, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia. Not surprisingly, Duemig adopts the style of the autocratic coach to accomplish this educational goal.

His rules and boundaries have been established on the show for years beginning with the cardinal rule of the program: Tampa Bay fans must be true and fervent fans of their local teams. They must be smart and forward thinking. They must not whine or make excuses for poor performance. They must demand excellence. If you violate the rules (fail to perform), Duemig will come down hard on you, calling you a narrow minded, shortsighted “diphead” like he did to Ori. His show is not a democracy, just like so many other non-sports talk radio programs thrive on being single minded. It is a formula for ratings success and generates large legions of fans.

Like so many athletic coaches, it can be argued that Duemig’s ultimate goal is not the humiliation of listeners (players), but instead the quest to make them better and improve their “game.” One can surmise that taking that approach will allow for listeners to become smarter fans, which will lead them to publicly demand winning teams, make local team owners pay attention to their demands, and ultimately improve the product they see on the fields, diamonds and rinks throughout their home region. Taking a “nice guy” approach isn’t called for here. It is that bombast and intolerance, the argumentative

and sometimes mean-spirited tenor, that gets attention and gets results in the hard hitting world of sports talk radio.

Criticism as Instruction

But more than bombast and intolerance, a coach succeeds when criticism is utilized as instruction. As Phillips (1978) contends, “For criticism to be used effectively as a teaching device, the student must be convinced that a particular change in his behavior will improve his effectiveness. He must understand that the change is worth attaining and that the ways suggested by the teacher will bring it about. If he does not agree to these ideas then he will not attempt to change. The student may thus inquire about the worth of the change in his life, whether or not the means proposed by the teacher will bring about the change, and whether or not the change will affect the responses of others in the desired way” (p. 193).

There was no better example of Duemig as teacher and coach during the week I sampled the show that the following interaction between him and caller “Damon”...

SD: Hello, Damon.

D: How ya doin’ there Big Dog?

SD: All right.

D: How’s everything today Man?

SD: Aw, it’s just fine.

D: Yeah, Man, I just wanted to chime in on a coupla things. Man, with these Buccaneers because you know, I’m sittin’ back and ah you know I’m no sports analyst or anything like that or no professional but I’m able to observe a coupla things myself about

uh Mr. Gruden. No disrespect to him, Big Dog, but this guy's supposed to be a offensive genius as everyone is quotin' him to be so if he's such a genius at implementing an offense that's going to put up points, I haven't seen it yet. I've seen some spurts of it with some games like with the Washington game last year when they ran the score up but Big Dog...

SD: Who else is, who else is, who else is know around the league as a quote, unquote offensive genius that's a head coach in this league?

D: A coupla of them.

SD: Let's hear them.

D: Parcells is supposed to be one.

SD: Ah, he's a defensive coach. Let me hear, come on, let's go.

D: Yeah, uh, well, I'm just sayin'....

SD: No, no, no, no, no. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. Tell me who else is known as an offensive genius in this league.

D: Well...

SD: As a head coach. And when you can call and...when you can come back and tell me I'll let you back on. [with extremely sarcastic tone] *That is your lesson for today, son.* [disconnects the caller]

Here, Duemig literally tells the caller he has taught him a lesson about how to be a smart fan. The call would likely have gone a lot differently if the fan had been able to name just one head coach who is thought of as an “offensive genius.” The caller, in a sense, becomes representative of Duemig’s entire listening audience who is now put on notice that if they choose to call, they must be prepared and knowledgeable enough to back up their claims. To Duemig, this is what it means to be a real fan. Damon has now become both the student who has failed to complete his homework and the athlete who is pulled from the game for making a bonehead play. While his original criticism of the Buccaneers for not scoring enough points is worthy enough to get him on the air, his lack of ability to provide coherent solutions or coaching critique results in his dismissal from the “lineup.”

Positive Reinforcement

Like any other coach, Duemig realizes that a constant barrage of negativity cannot endear him to his listeners. So when a listener (player) makes a great call (play), when a listener seems to “get it,” that listener is rewarded with praise and admiration and held up as an example of a smart fan for all to admire and take after. Such was the case with caller “Harry.” Like many other hosts, Duemig makes use of a computer screen in front of him on which his production staff posts the names of upcoming callers and a basic synopsis of what they plan to talk about. When Duemig saw on his computer monitor that “Harry” wanted to discuss “Leon” McCardell, Duemig was quick to put his call on the air...

SD: Let’s go to Harry. Who I think might come up with the best of the day. Go ahead, Harry.

H: Hey Steve.

SD: How ya doing?

H: Just a couple of quick things then I'll get off and listen to you.

Uh, one thing was, uh, I don't know if Brad's checking down to this but, every time I see him turn around and throw that quick pass out to the sideline, I just start saying "Oh, no!"

SD: When does it ever work?

H: It always is no gain or one yard or lost a yard. It just...that and the other underneath stuff that you were talking about frustrated you so much. And the other point I had was uh, I've seen just about enough of Leon McCardell.

SD: [interrupting] Yeah, that's what's up on my screen and I had to laugh. Leon McCardell – that's perfect! That is absolutely perfect for him!

H: Isn't his 15 minutes about up?

SD: Yeah, it's up as far as I'm concerned. And yesterday may have been the last straw. And any Buc fan that wants to see Keenan McCardell in a Buc uniform again has gotta be kidding. You know, I mean for him to stop by the CBS studios in New York? I thought he was training in Houston.

H: [laughs] Well, I'll get on off of here, but uh, I just...it just kills me watching all the 3 yard plays with...nobody's running out past the first down marker.

SD: Well I don't like that either. Good job, Harry. I mean Leon McCardell. Yeah. He just happens to stop by the CBS studios in New York? Yeah! Saying its all smoke and mirrors, blah, blah blah...blah blah blah. He's literally name calling the Buccaneers. Maybe it is. You know. Isn't it something that both of your top receivers over the last 2 years have had a problem with the coach. Is it...is that ironic or is that fact? I mean, I know what Keyshawn's story was. I don't know what Keenan McCardell's story was. Although we've heard some of Keenan McCardell's story and a lot of it's a lie! So, I mean for him to conveniently stop by the New York studios? How could you as a Buc fan ever want that guy back in? I don't care if they have to go out on the street or call up Coach Markham and ask him to lend them T.T. Toliver and Freddy Solomon. I would never, ever take Keenan McCardell back on this football team ever again. And I'd make him rot! Bruce, make him rot!

This call stood out for a number of reasons. Primary among them are the fact that this call was the only call that week that included a brief moment of intertextuality, for making a reference to a popular advertising campaign by the famous American brewers Anheuser-Busch. In the campaign for their Budweiser brand, an actor portrays a spoiled, selfish professional athlete named Leon, who is interviewed by real-life sportscaster Joe Buck. The various ads parody the attention seeking, overpaid, loudmouth athletes of the day. By likening holdout receiver Keenan McCardell to Leon, the caller actually gets

more attention from the host than he does for his original purpose, criticizing the play of Bucs quarterback Brad Johnson. The call is also significant in that it “blames” a Buccaneer player who wasn’t even on the field (or in the stadium for that matter) for the team’s loss the previous Sunday.

Second, it can be argued that the content of this call is exactly what Duemig longs for from every caller – witty, insightful, intelligent criticism from a fan who demands excellence from the players who represent both his town and him. If Duemig is an educator, then Harry is his star pupil and if Duemig is a coach, Harry is his star athlete. He wins very public praise from Duemig for “getting it” when it comes to how a cocky player is ruining the game for both his teammates and the fans.

But something else is also happening here when Duemig heaps this type of praise on a caller – Duemig’s own presence and performance on the program becomes decidedly secondary to that of the caller. Good coaches, like good teachers, value those moments above all others as a sure sign of the success of their missions. Their work is truly complete when those under their tutelage shine and make them proud. This example serves to illustrate one of those moments.

The Masculine Coach and the Woman Athlete

With the impetus and enforcement of Title IX in educational settings, women have increasingly become athletes and coaches. The relationship between men coaches and women athletes has been the attention of some academic research. If Turman (2003) found that athletes prefer an autocratic coaching/teaching style, then some argue that women athletes, coached by men, require a different communication style to be effective.

For example, Anson Dorrance coached North Carolina's women soccer team to 15 national championships. In an article in *Sports Illustrated* (1998), Dorrance is quoted as summing up the difference between men's teams and women's teams:

“Women are more sensitive and more demanding of each other, and that combination is horrible,” Dorrance says. “Men are not sensitive and not demanding of each other, and that's a wonderful combination for building team chemistry. We can play with guys who are absolute jackasses. We have no standards for their behavior as long as they can play: *Just get me the ball*. But if a girl's a jerk, even though she gets me the ball, there's going to be a huge chemistry issue: *I don't want to play with her*. But she serves you the best ball on the team! *I would much rather play with So-and-so*. But you're terrible together! *I would rather play with her*. Why? *The other girl's a bitch*.”

He shrugs. “It's unfathomable to me,” he says, “but for them this is major.” (p. 88)

Dorrance's observations are confirmed by Deborah Tannen who maintains that cooperation, not competition, are motivations for most white girls' and women's connections: “To most women, conflict is a threat to connection, to be avoided at all costs. Disputes are preferably settled without direct confrontation. But to many men, conflict is the necessary means by which status is negotiated, so it is to be accepted and may even be sought, embraced, and enjoyed” (1990, p. 150). When these conversational strategies are deployed in coaching, direct conflict, name-calling, shaming tend to work with men, but are not effective with many women athletes.

During my interview with Duemig, we discussed the topic of female callers to sports talk radio shows. He indicated that while he believes women are intimidated by the prospect of calling a show, their calls end up being better, smarter calls because, as Duemig said, “Men spout shit and women come with facts.” The lone female caller to Duemig’s show during the week I sampled it seemed to prove Duemig right...

SD: Let’s go to Bridget, who is up next. Go ahead, Bridget.

B: Hi Steve.

SD: Hey.

B: Hey. First of all, I think everybody needs to just calm down as far as...I mean they’re acting like the season is just totally over.

The year we went to the Superbowl, we lost our first game to the New Orleans Saints.

SD: New England lost their first game last year 31 to nothing!

B: Exactly. So, you jump on, you jump off it just makes no sense.

And all these Phil Simms fans? The only think I have to say is Eli Manning. Did you see what happened to him yesterday?!

SD: [laughs] He almost lost his head.

B: He almost lost his whole body.

SD: Yeah.

B: Including his head. I mean, just give it a break. Calm down, everybody. Just, I mean, it’s going take time for the offensive line to gel. Um, honestly, I do feel like that Jon Gruden is going out getting too old, of, players, you know, but that’s just my opinion.

Um, eventually, I would say maybe by the fourth or fifth game that they will gel. They can't blame it on Kenyatta this, um, this week.

SD: Well no, but he shows how much of a team player he is. He asked to be traded yesterday.

B: Right yeah. Exactly. So...but I, ya know, I think everybody just needs to calm down. It's, it's ridiculous.

SD: Well, especially with the offensive line. I mean, did anybody expect this offensive line...now granted, it's not rocket science but it also...when you have sixty blitzes coming your way.

B: Exactly.

SD: There's gonna be some mixups. And, and, and when you don't...it's all about learning where the other guy's gonna be. And we saw some gaping, you know, misses yesterday of...one guy thinking the other guy was gonna pick him up and then...and once that happens, then I think you start sealing up a lot of these holes and you start doing other things.

B: You start doing other things. You're exactly right. So, everybody just calm down and you know, go Tampa Bay! But we'll be OK.

SD: Thank you, Bridget. And, you know...well I expect...if you want to vent. Go ahead and vent. That's what we're here for. But just, you know, back it up a little bit, that's all I'm asking. Back it...it was an ugly game to watch. I'll be the first one to tell you

that. I couldn't stand it. You know what, but all said and done, as bad as they played, guess what? They still had a chance to win the game.

Duemig's interaction with Bridget is markedly different from his usual insults and bombast. Instead, Duemig takes a much more cooperative tone with Bridget, laughing as he agrees with her review of the previous day's game and even consoling fans by reminding them that with an underachieving and weak offensive line, fans can only hold a limited amount of hope for the success of the team during the coming year. This caller seems to support Duemig's notion that "men spout shit and women come with facts," while also supporting the idea that female callers to his show are less in need of the masculine autocratic "coaching" than male callers.

That Duemig encourages Bridget to vent is also interesting in light of research on masculine and feminine styles of conversation. Women, according to Deborah Tannen, "match troubles," to demonstrate a sympathetic understanding of one's plight and to reinforce similarities (1990, p. 58). Jennifer Coates argues that one facet of conversation between women friends is "complaining to each other." Coates maintains, "the mutual self-disclosure that is typical of women friends' talk allows us to talk about difficult subjects, to check our perceptions against those of our friends, and to seek support" (1996, p. 52). That Duemig leaves his autocratic masculine style to encourage a strategy typical of women's friendships speaks to his ability to employ differently gendered, and effective, styles according to his listeners' needs and proclivities.

Deferring to the Coach

A teacher/student relationship, like a teacher/coach relationship, relies heavily on dialogue between the two parties. This dialogue, however, is never symmetrical in a coach/athlete relationship. Indeed, Duemig's listeners work very hard to maintain their own "one-down" position in relation to Duemig. They constantly qualify their remarks, hedge their discursive bets, and never engage in the kind of name-calling or criticism of others typical of Duemig's authoritative style.

The above callers, with the notable exception of Ori, introduce themselves and their topics with carefully crafted previews which are almost apologetic in tone—as if they need to justify taking up Duemig's time: "Yeah, Man, I just wanted to chime in on a coupla things." "Just a couple of quick things then I'll get off and listen to you." "Well, I'll get on off of here." This apologetic deference also happens in the call below:

SD: Let's get back to the phone lines. Ray is up next. Hello, Ray.

R: Hey, Big Dog. How's it goin'?

SD: Good.

R: Hey I just wanna throw a couple of little numbers out at you . . .

Tim is even more concerned with time in his preview:

SD: Let's go to Tim. Go ahead Tim

T: Hey two things really quickly.

On one hand, these apologetic previews might seem to contradict Tannen's "conflict" argument: if men do connection through conflict, why are the callers so deferential?

Tannen also argues that men recognize hierarchy and their "place" as one-down to other, more powerful, men. Bell and Golombisky (2004, p. 303) claim that "most students know

not to pick fights with a boss more powerful or a coach whose word is law. This makes sense in any superior/subordinate relationship.” These callers are deferring to Duemig—a coach whose word is law.

A second way callers enact their subordinate relationship to Duemig is through qualifying their comments, taking care not to usurp Duemig’s expert role in the conversation. I’ve marked these qualifying comments with italics. Damon says, “Man, with these Buccaneers because you know, I’m sittin’ back and ah you know *I’m no sports analyst or anything like that or no professional* but I’m able to observe a coupla things myself about uh Mr. Gruden.” Ray says, “And you know, to me, and *I’m certainly not an expert*, but from watching that game I could have sworn that one of those gray-hair coaches on the sideline for Washington was Buddy Ryan because that looked like the 46 defense to me.” Later in the same call, Ray says, “There was only one team, like I said *I’m not a stat geek I didn’t check it all, maybe one of your guys in the back can*, I think there was only 1 team that won this week in the NFL and that was the New England Patriots that had less running attempts than the other team.”

Instead of care not to usurp Duemig’s expert role, Bridget offers an observation and then takes it back with the qualification, “That’s just my opinion.” In a call responding to Bridget’s, Edward “sucks up” to Duemig through association with her call. Instead of giving Bridget her due, however, with total agreement, Edward even qualifies his support of her.

SD: Let’s go to Edward. Go ahead, Edward.

E: [sound of receiver being picked up from speakerphone] Hey,
big dog, how ya doin?

SD: Alright.

E: Uh...I think the lady that just called, Bridget her name?

SD: Yeah.

E: *I'm in pretty much agreement with you and her, you know, um...you got, we gotta be a little bit patient.*

Edward also sums up his take on the kick return game, not as “*just* my opinion,” but as if his opinion—alone—counts: “But um, *in my opinion*, it was a few bright spots, uh, the kick return game was better than I’ve seen it in a long time.”

Tim employs still another strategy to defer to the coach as he ingratiates himself to Duemig through humor:

SD: Let’s go to Tim. Go ahead Tim

T: Hey two things really quickly. One – I think we need to get Galloway some, maybe, Poli-Grip gloves to help him catch a ball...

SD: Right in his hands!! No excuse!

T: I know it’s difficult when the quarterback hits you in the hands...

SD: [laughs]

T: ... I know that’s a hard one to catch. And the other thing is of course Garner was on his way to the bus, because God knows he didn’t go to the house if you know what I mean.

SD: [laughs] Alright, thanks!

Tim made good use of the time he had on the air to criticize receiver Joey Galloway and running back Charlie Garner for perceived underperformance. The call elicited a laugh

from host Duemig and doubtlessly had other listeners laughing along with it. Most importantly, Tim maintains his “one-down” status to the coach by *not* employing Duemig’s name-calling, shaming, and silencing style.

Summary

At the beginning of this chapter, I compared local sports talk radio to community theater, and as I close this chapter, I strongly believe the performance analogies fit perfectly in the critical analysis of this genre. While *The Jim Rome Show* encourages callers to essentially present a monologue, rendering the host almost invisible in the wings during that time, *The Steve Duemig Show* is in many ways more of a series of two person productions during calls, with the host playing the role of the teacher/coach preparing his students/players for the national stage.

While these two programs are only a small portion of the sports talk radio landscape, they do speak volumes about how the format operates so differently on the national level compared to the local level. At the heart of the differences is caller strategy. Whereas the established form and format of *The Jim Rome Show* expects and rewards callers who perform bombast, braggadocio and a wide cultural literacy beyond the sports world, *The Steve Duemig Show* rewards callers who follow the lead of the “big dog,” i.e. crafting commentary that demonstrates to both the local audience and the rest of the sports world that fans in Tampa Bay *know* their sports, *demand* a quality product and *refuse* to settle for mediocrity. While callers to each program are certainly “performing” while their calls are aired, that element is far less obvious during Duemig’s show, and again the reason can be boiled down to strategy. Jim Rome’s callers appear to know that when they call, Rome will fade into the background, thus allowing them to

have the stage alone and perform, largely, to an audience of their fellow listeners. As the transcripts of Rome's calls show, many callers openly reference other "legend" callers during their comments as if to call them out individually in an attempt to prove them to be less masculine. Callers to Duemig's show, on the other hand, seems to know that Duemig is *there*, not just because he is engaging them in dialogue during the calls, but because of the *presence* he creates for himself on his show. It can be argued that Duemig's aura, that of a hypermasculine, autocratic teacher/coach, is changing the tenor of the sports landscape in Tampa Bay one caller at a time by, in effect, changing local public attitude when it comes to how a community relates to and identifies with its sports teams. Though the callers to Duemig's show are often heard subordinating themselves to his (hyper)masculine authority, it can be argued that in doing that, they are willingly learning to become better sports fans and better citizens. In short, *The Steve Duemig Show* is a sense-making, educational, rhetorical vehicle, dressed in the clothing of (hyper) masculine performance and delivered as an entertainment product to an audience eager to participate in and learn from what they are hearing.

As Snow (1987, quoted in Brummet, 1991) notes, "Media are not simply organizations involved in disseminating information to an audience; media function as a strategy for such matters as maintaining social networks, facilitating economic activity, providing the basis for everyday life routines and perhaps most importantly, for interpreting experience in other institutions" (pp. 225-26). Local sports talk radio, then, has become a vehicle for understanding and defining how a community relates to its sports teams. The Tampa Bay community is developing a vocabulary and a mindset for how to relate to sports based in part on the content of *The Steve Duemig Show*. I believe

that findings of this chapter can serve as a roadmap to success for other communities long associated with losing sports franchises, as well as the radio stations in those markets who are looking to bring the sports talk format to those markets. Because the profitability of professional sports is tied directly with fan interest, and the profitability of radio stations is tied with the number of listeners who tune in and (hopefully) patronize the station's advertisers, sports talk radio has the potential to succeed above and beyond expectations if air personalities who approach their shows like Duemig does are a part of the station's schedule. Put simply, the rhetoric of sports talk radio can and does fundamentally alter and define public perception about what it means to be a "big sports town."

Chapter Five

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

This study of sports talk radio dealt with the broad sweep of history of the medium, the national stage of the Jim Rome Show, and the local community created in Tampa Bay through Steve Duemig. Chapter Two argued that sports talk radio has historically invited more and more direct participation from its audience, leading to an increased personal and social connection with this broadcast genre. The chapter explored the changing forms of the “representative anecdote” to help define how the format is enacted from year to year and decade to decade, conventions that hold today. Chapter Three illustrated how callers to a national sports talk radio program, *The Jim Rome Show*, employ distinct strategic patterns in order to produce successful on-air performances on the show, which in turn allows them to create social identification and engage in social critique. Chapter Four examined how a local sports talk radio program, *The Steve Duemig Show*, serves to help shape and define identity and community through cooperative dialogue and conversation, enabled through the coach as pedagogue, to rhetorically co-construct a sense of living in a “true sports town.”

At the beginning of this study, I set out to look beyond sports talk radio’s abrasive exterior in search of what lies beneath it and to explore this broadcast format as a discursive space – a place where many come to make sense of how sports fit into their lives. I believe that in this space, sports fans are afforded a singular and unique venue to

cultivate not only a deeper understanding of the sports they love, but to perform community and establish identity(ies), while knowingly or unknowingly contributing to the larger public discourse on race, gender, sexuality and class and their politics. I believe this study has accomplished what it set out to do, especially in the way of allowing for a closer and deeper analysis of a form of public expression that many dismiss out of hand as trivial and unimportant, especially when compared to the harder edged political discourse of right wing talk radio. I was inspired to do this study after writing a final paper for a seminar on identity, and I am not surprised to find that as I conclude the study, there are many ways that sports talk radio can help many of us to better express and better know who we are and who we want to be as sports fans, members of a community, men, women, straight, gay, and as members of a particular racial/ethnic group.

Sports talk radio is playing a critical role in the evolution of what it means to be a modern sports fan. For those who make sports such a big part of their lives, that evolution these days has included a heightened sense of the dramatic. The technology of radio has allowed many of us to get connected and stay connected with the sports and athletes we love and voice and cultivate our identity through the medium of sports talk radio in increasingly more dramatic, emphatic and sometimes hyperbolic terms. Barry Brummet reminds us of the importance of drama, “by examining what people are *saying*, the critic may discover what cultures are celebrating or mourning—and the critic may recommend other ways of speaking which may serve as better equipment for living” (1984, p. 161). The rhetorical complexity and multivalence of sports talk radio places it squarely within larger frames of media, sport, and culture.

Decades ago, being a sports fan was a much more distant and disconnected experience, both literally and figuratively. For example, a fan of the Chicago Cubs who lived in rural southern Illinois may have listened to games broadcast on the radio. That fan may have owned a Cubs cap that a relative or friend purchased on a business trip to Chicago. There was no television, which meant that fan could only construct pictures of the game in their minds. Because long distance travel was expensive, he would never see a game in person at Wrigley Field. A collection of baseball cards kept in a shoebox enhanced that fan's experience.

But today, the experience is colored in higher definition. Advancements in technology and the evolution of professional sports as a big business have allowed sports to be beamed into homes through television and the Internet, all day and all night. The sports apparel industry is booming through sales of both new and "retro" jerseys and caps. In response to the consumer demands, fans are now able to buy and wear the same style and make of uniforms and caps worn by athletes on the field of play, and if you have the money, you can literally own the same jersey that your favorite athlete once wore during a critical game in that championship season.

Perhaps the ultimate in sports intimacy was conceived in the late 20th century, when both current and retired athletes tapped into the nostalgia market by offering fans with enough money the chance to at least go on a cruise with or at most literally play a sport with their favorite professional athletes in so-called "fantasy" encounters. These encounters have given fans up-close and personal access to their favorite players, while giving many aging players the chance to not only profit financially, but to stay in the public eye long after their playing careers have ended. Many baseball "fantasy camps"

charge fans \$5,000 or more for long weekends with stars like Pete Rose, Brooks Robinson, Yogi Berra and Frank Robinson.

Today, many professional sports teams have also responded to this evolution by hosting popular public relations events called “fan fests,” free (though heavily commercially sponsored) open-house events held prior to the beginning of the season where fans can walk around the field of play, receive autographs and take pictures with their favorite players, and participate in live question and answer sessions with coaches and owners.

It’s no surprise then that this new breed of fans that now feel so connected to sports have the desire to speak openly, publicly and often about the myriad of issues sports bring to our national and local discourse every day. Drama—protagonists, antagonists, conflict, and resolution—is the form of that discourse. From steroids to salary caps to non-sports topics, fans participate in this drama through talk. Sports talk radio is the dramatic outlet for those concerns. The growth and ratings success of the sports talk format has served the interests of both fans and radio executives better than either could have imagined.

Findings of this Study

Each of the findings of this study sheds new light on the wide-ranging effects this radio genre is having on the culture of sports fans today and on how we make sense of our lives and interact with the mass media in the 21st century. These findings have been uncovered because the perspective of this study acknowledged that sports talk radio was a text worthy of analysis. This is an important notion to point out because simply by making that acknowledgement, this study has simultaneously advanced the cause of

modern rhetoric and most certainly offended some rhetorical studies traditionalists. At the center of this controversy, I believe, are broad issues of power and politics as well as issues of how power and politics are played out in texts themselves. In fact, many so called “traditional” texts are manifestations of and claims to social and political power, from the orations on government by Aristotle to Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. If they were not about those topics directly, then they were at the very least spoken or written by persons in positions of social or political power. Throughout much of the history of rhetorical study, the rule seems to have been that if the text doesn’t speak of social and political power, it’s not a text worthy of scholarly review. The findings of this study will help to reformulate what “worthy” centers of rhetorical study are, and subsequently help to re-conceptualize rhetoric as a whole, which I believe is an entirely healthy and appropriate notion. I believe that I have been true to the directions that Brummett (1991) urged scholars to take when he said that “[R]hetorical studies needs to expand the kinds of functions and manifestations that it studies. The rhetorical dimensions of popular culture will not begin to be fully explored until scholars can break apart texts as defined by sources and consider how such diffuse texts, or discrete texts, broken up and resituated in appropriational manifestations, might be woven into the everyday flow of signification that constitutes popular culture, or into the deeper conditional meanings that shore up whole ways of life” (p. 51).

As I am about to illustrate, the common thread that links all of these findings is that the intellectual emphasis that went into studying them was not solely on the source of the message (which can alternately be viewed as either the sports talk radio genre as a whole or the host of the sports talk program specifically), but on the relationships

between and among the host, the caller and the audience. Again, traditionalists have always had a preference for keeping the critical focus almost solely on a singular source or author (sender) and for keeping the focus far away from the audience (receiver). It is the richness and drama of the audience and the content of their calls that gave this study its most revealing material.

Community, Identity and Sports Talk Radio

This study found that sports talk radio is an important local resource through which fans individually and communities collectively build their senses of identity, esteem and public confidence. Authors such as Euchner (1993) and Shropshire (1995) have written extensively about the relationship between cities and the image they portray both internally and externally through their sports teams. Eckstein and Delaney (2002) examined how many cities promote public funding for new sports stadiums by appealing to what they call “community self esteem” and “community collective consciousness.” The authors define community self esteem as having both an internal and external component, the former component being “a highly symbolic notion about how people living in a community perceive their community” (p. 237) and the latter component revolving around “what sort of social amenities, such as professional sports and sports stadiums, does one city have to offer relative to other cities” (p. 238). The authors go on to differentiate community self esteem from community collective conscience, defining that collective conscience as “the shared values, beliefs and experiences that bind community members to one another” (p. 238). In the case of sports talk radio interactions between callers and hosts, a socially constructed reality is created with every call. These interactions constantly create, re-create and solidify the identities of not only

callers and hosts, but of communities, teams and athletes. These identities are performed through conventions of the genre and taught by hosts to willing audiences.

In an era where more and more of us do not know our next door neighbors by name, where voter participation in local elections continues to plummet, and where many of us are hard-pressed to name the city council representative or county commissioner that serves our district, professional sports bind communities together, for better or worse. Persons of different races, classes, ethnicities and incomes all find common ground in cheering for the home team. Even though many studies have suggested that investing tax dollars in new stadiums to keep professional teams from relocating to other cities does not pay off financially in the long run, many people still support the taxation solely on the basis of their desire to maintain the image that they live, work and raise their families in a “major league city.” Appeals to that sense of community self esteem and collective consciousness often trump the economic and financial hardships that would otherwise turn taxpayers off when a vote is taken on whether or not to create a new tax for the purpose of keeping major league sports in their cities.

Examining sports talk radio through a rhetorical lens means looking at sports talk radio content as an example of individuals calling in to voice and to performatively create that community self esteem and collective consciousness and maintain the best possible public image of the community they call home. The constant goal is to help make sure that your community is set apart as excellent, unique and a winner on and off the field and that you, the listener, following whatever written or unwritten rules the program/host has set, make a positive impression on the listening audience.

Caller/Host Relationships

Talk radio hosts in general hold perhaps a unique position in the mass media: these hosts act as quasi-journalists, community leaders, and friends to the listener. Because of this, the host holds unique power in that he/she can build up or tear down a caller's self image based upon both the content of their phone call and the host's response to that phone call. The roots of this uniqueness lie in the concept of parasocial interaction, a concept that Horton & Wohl (1956) defined as an "illusion of intimacy" between media personalities and audience members. As Rubin & Step (2000) point out, "Audience members often develop quasi-relationships with media personalities, similar to that with social friends. They feel that they know and understand the personae. They feel comfortable with the personae; as they do with a friend, and feel that the personae is natural and down-to-earth; they look forward to seeing or listening to the personae and empathize if he or she makes a mistake..." (p. 639). It is that sense of connectedness, that the sports talk host is a friend and fellow sports fan that takes people through listening stages that begin with curiosity and end with actual call-in participation.⁶

What sets sports talk radio apart from virtually all other types of call in radio programming, however, is that when a caller is taken to task or ridiculed for his/her point of view by a host, which happens frequently in this broadcast genre, the caller actively participates in the drama of the event, the discourse, and most importantly, the conflict of the interaction. For Carey (1988) "The model here is not that of information acquisition, though such acquisition occurs, but of dramatic action in which the reader [of a newspaper] joins a world of contending forces as an observer at a play" (p. 21). Live on the radio, the caller moves from observer to actor on stage, representing his home town,

team, and point of view. Ridicule becomes an important part of the rising action and the conflict of the drama, creating by host and caller. Conversely, if the caller makes a positive impression on the host and audience, the caller is seen as successful and likable and his/her teams and city are looked upon as being credible, worthy “winners.” This, too, creates the drama of the action—with a successful resolution to the conflict. The caller’s abilities to participate in the action, the reputation of the teams they support and the public image of the cities they live in are on the line each time the decision is made to call the program.

Caller/host interactions, examined through close textual analysis, illustrates how the sports talk radio genre is not best understood through the hypodermic model, injecting an audience with information about sports. Instead, these interactions studied through their conventions, rhetorical strategies, and performed drama demonstrate how sports talk radio functions as a resource and a vehicle that sports fans utilize to participate in the larger drama of sports and culture. This notion also helps illuminate how the societal role of the media in general has changed and evolved in the modern era. As Snow (1997) states, “[M]edia are not simply organizations involved in disseminating information to an audience; media function as a strategy for such matters as maintaining social networks, facilitating economic activity, providing the basis for everyday life routines, and perhaps most importantly, for interpreting experience in other institutions,” (pp. 225-226).

White Invisibility and Cultural Authority over Race and Class

Throughout this study, the concept of sports talk radio as a source of empowerment for the fan has been a lens through which I have viewed all of the caller/host interactions, as well as my interview with local host Steve Duemig. That lens

also allows one to examine the genre as a vehicle toward revealing even more about race and class.

The issue of examining race as it relates to sports talk radio presents a series of formidable challenges. Ideally, because radio is a non-visual medium, race should be a non-issue when studying this genre and sweeping utopian statements about how race “disappears” on sports talk radio should be commonplace. But even though it’s impossible to see skin color when listening to the radio, whiteness is the backdrop— invisible, assumed, standing for both “all” and “nothing.” Michael Dyer explains:

For those in power in the West, as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it. . . . White people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people’s; white people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail. Most of this is not done deliberately and maliciously; there are enormous variations of power amongst white people, to do with class, gender and other factors; goodwill is not unheard of in white people’s engagement with others. White power none the less reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal. (1997, p. 9-10)

The most popular and recognized faces of nationally syndicated sports talk radio, Jim Rome, Dan Patrick, Tony Bruno, Tony Kornheiser, J.T. the Brick and Andrew Siciliano, are white. Throughout the history of sports talk radio, there has not been one African-American who has broken through on a national level and enjoyed the level of both celebrity and financial benefit that the white hosts have.⁷ The only person to come close has been Art Rust, Jr., the noted sports historian and talk radio pioneer from New York, who enjoyed regional success in the Northeast, but whose show was never nationally syndicated. The world of sports radio talk is very much a white, male, elite world, reproducing itself as the “norm” in its own image, unaware of its own power and privilege as normative.

In the past 25 years, four incidents of racist discourse, uttered in public, by white men caused huge ripple effects throughout the sports world and beyond, and were fueled by repeated replays on television. Those examples are:

1. The 1987 incident involving Los Angeles Dodgers Vice President Al Campanis, who, when asked by ABC’s Ted Koppel on *Nightline* about the lack of blacks in positions of power in Major League Baseball stated...

"I truly believe that they may not have some of the necessities to be, let's say, a field manager, or perhaps a general manager . . . Well, I don't say all of them, but they certainly are short. How many quarterbacks do you have, how many pitchers do you have, that are black? Why are black men, or black people, not good swimmers? Because they don't have the buoyancy."⁸

Koppel was aghast at the remarks and gave Campanis multiple opportunities to retract them as the interview continued. Campanis did not. One day later, he publicly apologized for the remarks. Two days later, the Dodgers fired Campanis.

2. The 1988 remarks made by the late Jimmy “The Greek” Snyder as he was videotaped by a news crew while dining at Duke Zeibert’s, a Washington, DC area restaurant. Snyder, who appeared on the tape to be at least somewhat intoxicated, said that blacks had “been bred” to have “big thighs” which therefore led to them being better athletes. Snyder added...

“This goes all the way back to the Civil War, when during the slave trading the slave owner would breed his big black to his big woman so that he could have a big black kid. That's where it all started.”

Then, in an attempt to be funny, Snyder discussed the topic of black coaches in the NFL by saying...

“They've got everything. If they take over coaching like everybody wants them to, there's not going to be anything left for the white people. I mean all the players are black. The only thing the whites control are the coaching jobs.”⁹

The public outcry over this incident far outweighed that of the Campanis incident and led CBS to fire Snyder, which essentially destroyed his credibility and his career.

3. The 1997 incident involving comments made by professional golfer Fuzzy Zoeller following fellow golfer Tiger Woods victory at the prestigious Masters tournament in Augusta, Georgia. Said Zoeller:

"That little boy is driving well and he's putting well. He's doing everything it takes to win. So, you know what you guys do when he gets in here? You pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it and tell him not to serve fried chicken next year. Got it? Or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve."¹⁰

Tradition at the Masters allows the previous years champion to set the menu for what is called the Champions Dinner, held each year during the tournament. Zoeller, who had a reputation on the PGA tour as a jokester and a light hearted man, later apologized for the comments, but lost several endorsements over the remarks, which were played *ad nauseum* on both television and radio.

4. Finally, in 2003, noted political radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, who had been signed by ESPN television to provide commentary on their *Sunday NFL Countdown* program, infuriated fans and critics nationwide by revisiting an issue that was thought to be long dead: African-American quarterbacks in the National Football League. Of Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb, Limbaugh said...

"I don't think he's been that good from the get-go. I think what we've had here is a little social concern in the NFL. The media has been very desirous that a black quarterback do well. There is a little hope invested in McNabb and he got a lot of credit for the performance of this team that he didn't deserve. The defense carried this team."¹¹

What made Limbaugh's comments even more revealing was that it was not the first time he made racially insensitive remarks while on the air. According to Reid (2003),

Limbaugh once told an African-American caller to “take that bone out of your nose and call me back,”¹² while on another occasion he said, “Have you ever noticed how all composite pictures of wanted criminals resemble Jesse Jackson?” (online). While it’s fair to say that thrust of the comments were directed toward the media and not McNabb, the ensuing furor caused Limbaugh to step down from his ESPN post and motivated ESPN to issue statements distancing the network from his remarks.

What do these four incidents have in common? Each was uttered by a powerful white man in a position to be listened to—in sports management, in gambling, as a player, and as a broadcaster. Each incident searches desperately for an “out” for the speaker (retractions, drunkenness, “a jokester,” media institutions, not personal attack). And each incident obscures the institutional racism, classism, and sexism that granted these white men authority to speak and to be listened to, while treating the racist remarks as anomalies of individuals rather than foundations of sports and media.

Class, race, and gender are thoroughly imbricated in the authority, deference, and obfuscation in these four media “events.” Patricia Williams lists five “points” on race that are especially salient with regards to these four incidents: 1) Race is not a cipher for poverty. 2) Race is not a cipher for disease. 3) Race is not a cipher for bestiality. 4) Race is not a cipher for exotic entertainment. 5) Race is not a cipher for the whole of life (p. 62-63).

Sports and media epitomized in these four incidents make precisely these ties: whether a “Hoop Dreams” upward mobility of black athletes or the economic power and prestige of the speakers, poverty/race/class/gender are implicit in who is granted to authority to “judge” others—especially when the other is black. AIDS, especially among

black athletes, is a constant topic of the white media. Bestiality—the power of “those dehumanizing stereotypes of big baboons”—saturates sports and media construction of blackness, and inversely, absences it in white athletes. Exotic entertainment is made “exotic” in and through race. And finally, “whole of life” introduces the many, many ways the media justifies and discourses success and failure: “like hard work or personal responsibility or birth order or class or God or the good old glories of the human spirit” (Williams, 1997, p. 63). Sports and media, ciphering race in those ways, also hides it under the “glories of the human spirit.”

On *The Jim Rome Show*, Fuzzy Zoeller and Rush Limbaugh have joined the likes of Snyder and Campanis as targets of humiliation each time racist incidents are brought up on the program. Rome will even play the audio of Zoeller making his remarks as comic relief during discussions of racist happenings that make sports news and become show topics. But in the case of the Rome show, whiteness is the naturalized backdrop, even as he punishes “racist” remarks, and the spectre of “white guilt” raises its head. More importantly, the punishment Rome exacts reminds us again of Rome’s cultural authority—he is the final arbitrator of racism, even as he freely appropriates one genre of black speech rhythms and styles.

Rome constantly uses the phrases “fresh” and “fat” (or “phat”) to describe anything positive. Even his acts of referring to his program and the listener community as “The Jungle” can be read as having racial subtexts (from the racist epithet “Jungle Bunny” to Spike Lee’s interracial love story *Jungle Fever*). As E. Patrick Johnson explains of a speech community’s style being appropriated by others, “Once signs and symbols permeate the fabric of popular culture, the foundations on which the meanings of

the symbols and signs are based become sites of contestation” (1995, p. 138). While largely white, male audiences of Rome’s show may admire and imitate Rome’s appropriation of this genre and its symbols and signs, Williams reminds us that “language identified as black is habitually flattened into some singularized entity that in turn becomes synonymous with ignorance, slang, big lips and sloppy tongues, incoherent ideas, and very bad—terribly unruly!—linguistic acts” (p. 36).

Such “appropriation” and “flattening” by Jim Rome loses its celebratory ring for whites when applied to Latinos and in particular toward Chicanos. Mariscal (1999) notes that Rome donned a faux-Mexican accent when attempting to re-enact for the listening audience boxing promoter Don King’s mugging in Mexico City where King’s \$10,000 Rolex watch was ripped from his wrist (p. 114).

Whether interpreted as flattery or racism, Rome’s allusions to and performances of blackness or Latino-ness stem from this cultural authority to render the world as he knows it and to “set standards of humanity” (Dyer 1997, p. 9). This social power with regards to class is blatant, and not at all checked by class guilt. Rome is quick to deride low-class whites as “trailer trash” and “rednecks” (or simply “necks”) and employs many similar stereotypes when discussing disgraced figure skater and current boxer Tonya Harding.

However, in the very recent past, Rome has backed away from what in the past was his frequent association of “white trash” with NASCAR. Rome had frequently called the racing circuit “Neckcar,” derided fans for wanting to watch a “perpetual left turn” and referred to the city of Fontana, CA, the home of California’s biggest annual NASCAR event as “Fontucky.” As NASCAR has increased its fan base, garnered bigger and better

corporate sponsorship, and given attention to its white, wealthy, male stars, Rome has tempered his disdain for “necks.” NASCAR has gone mainstream: meaning middle and upper-middle class, white, and extremely profitable for almost anyone associated with it. Today, this includes Rome himself, who now frequently has NASCAR drivers as guests on his show.

Why then is this type of subtle racism or classism, or any racism or classism for that matter, largely absent from local sports talk radio? Much of it has to do, of course, with the differing missions of local and national sports talk. National personalities like Jim Rome now need to reach as wide an audience as possible in a talk radio landscape where conservative rhetoric dominates the airwaves. As I pointed out earlier, Rome is competing head to head each day, in most of those markets which carry his show live, against Rush Limbaugh. Race baiting, sexism and classism, while never the most attractive or politically correct lines of discourse, do get the attention of the audience. They get them talking, thinking, calling and listening. That’s what the hosts and radio executives are in business to do. I believe that sports talk radio, while not overtly racist, is racially polarizing. Similarly, while not overtly classist, the genre does at times play on class stereotypes in order to generate listenership and ratings.

The bottom line is still the fact that both Jim Rome and Steve Duemig are, in fact, white males, and are exercising a specific type of power through their programs that only white males can exercise. While Duemig’s face is not marketed actively in the promotion of his program in the visual media, Rome’s is. Still, in ways large and small, Rome and Duemig make the most of the power of their images and create for their listeners, as Dyer’s quote above made reference to, the dominant image of the sports world both

nationally and locally. Further, these men, through their programs, create community and forge identity *in their own image*. In the case of Rome's show, there is a particularly biting irony: no matter what race you really are, it can be argued that all "Clones" are white.

Sports Talk Radio and Gender

According to Douglas (2002), "Talk radio is as much – maybe even more – about gender politics at the end of the [twentieth] century than it is about party politics. There were different masculinities enacted on the radio, from Howard Stern to Rush Limbaugh, but they were all about challenging and overthrowing, if possible, the most revolutionary of social movements, feminism. The men's movement of the 1980's found it's outlet, and that was talk radio" (p. 485).

Today, Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern have been joined by Jim Rome, Steve Duemig and many others in performing their own brand of masculinity on sports talk radio. In an era when all things male (and heterosexual) seem to be making a pop culture comeback through the mass media (as the new cable television network "Spike TV," billed as "the first network for men," illustrates), sports talk radio seems a perfect fit to help give voice to this latest explosion of heterosexual maleness. At work in sports talk radio is the dominant theoretical paradigm of what Connell (1990) called "hegemonic masculinity," defined as "the culturally idealized form of masculine character" (p. 83). Also at work within the paradigm of hegemonic masculinity are the concepts that women and homosexual men are relegated to the margins. Indeed, Connell's example of "complicit masculinity" is the Monday-morning quarterback, the fellow who hasn't the physical "goods" to play on the field, but can certainly talk about the play the next day—

with authority. Commenting on mediated coverage of sports, Trujillo (1994) wrote, “Media coverage of sports reinforces traditional masculinity in at least three ways. It privileges the masculine over the feminine or homosexual image by linking it to a sense of positive cultural values. It depicts the masculine image as ‘natural’ or conventional while showing alternative images as unconventional or deviant. And it personalizes traditional masculinity by elevating its representatives to places of heroism and denigrating strong females or homosexuals” (p. 97).

Professional sports, especially Major League Baseball and the National Football League, are in many ways the perfect contexts to be analyzed and deconstructed by callers to sports talk radio shows because these sports represent the ultimate in hegemonic masculinity: strong, muscular, athletic men engaged in a “battle” for victory in a zero sum game. What continues to fascinate me, and I’m sure many other scholars who study the sports world, is that for all of its macho, heterosexual outer layer, professional sports still has a great deal of homoerotic subtext. Today there is still no active major league baseball player or professional football player in the United States publicly living his life as an “out” homosexual. The clubhouses and locker rooms of these sports are notorious for harboring an openly outward homophobia beyond any other arena in our culture. But just as uniquely homophobic as the sports arena can be, a startling paradox is at play. Professional athletes often display what can be perceived as homoerotic behavior on the fields of play. Hugging a male teammate after a great play has been commonplace for a long time on sports fields, but certainly not in boardrooms following announcements of record profits. For years prior to his diagnosis of HIV, Los Angeles Lakers legend Earvin “Magic” Johnson and Detroit Pistons standout Isaiah

Thomas would kiss during pre-game introductions when the Lakers and Pistons were playing one another. But what has always intrigued me the most is the fact that as rigidly heterosexual as professional football and baseball players are made out to be, their fields of play are literally the only arenas in our society where a man can slap another man on the buttocks and that action be deemed to be socially and culturally acceptable, causing no disturbance whatsoever on the part of the receiver of the slap.

Foucault (1994) argues that men's arenas have always been shot through with this paradox: male only events, gatherings, and organizations give rise to opportunities for intimate social, political, and physical interactions, even as these same institutions produce discourses and practices that constantly survey and police the interactions that occur there. Male bodies—epitomized in the forms of (now steroid induced) perfection—make sports and masculinity more than complex homoeroticism. Tim Miller writes, “our bodies are much more layered and complex and messy than a nice tidy word like ‘discourse’ would ever suggest. The flesh that men occupy stinks, fucks, shits, is written on, is blown apart, is fetishized, triumphs, fails, and eventually dies. . . . We jumped into the abyss of acknowledging the warfare that surrounds men's bodies, these bodies trained to fear vulnerability and each other” (2001, p. 280, 298).

I believe this study has shown that the caller/host interactions replicated and reinforced the ideals of hegemonic masculinity almost to the letter (especially in the local talk radio calls). Throughout my analysis, I found that the tenor of male callers was overwhelmingly aggressive, highly critical and competitive. This was especially true with callers to *The Jim Rome Show*, who themselves were, each day, competing for their calls to be deemed the “huge call of the day.” The not-so-subtle reference to “huge” is a

marvelous testimony to the social power that attends to the phallus. In Fiona Giles's (1997) collection, *Dick for a Day*, dozens of women writers and artists answer the question, "What would you do if you had a dick for a day?" Terry McMillan begins her answer, "First of all, I'd want to have a big one—and I'd show everybody." "Showing everybody," through aggression, criticism, and competition is the mark of sports, masculinity, and callers on the Jim Rome Show.

Just as whiteness and "middle-class-ness" is the naturalized backdrop for sports talk radio, masculinity also assumes a normative function. Women callers, then, not only adopt a different style, but by their very difference, reaffirm and reinstitute the masculine norms. If broadcasters are all white and elite, reflective of caller's race and economic hopes, then the topics are decidedly masculine with a distinct lack of interest in discussing women's sports, even to the point of openly deriding the WNBA. Discussions of women's beach volleyball center on the skimpy bikinis worn by the competitors. If masculinity is alive and well, femininity exists on talk radio as absence, lack, and difference. This study found that the few women who called evidenced cooperation and common ground, a decidedly different style from the bombast and aggression of hosts and callers. Such difference only reaffirms the norm.

However, it must be noted that while Rome and his callers do advance a highly hyper-masculine rhetoric, the program (and Rome himself) will often become highly contradictory and advance a much more liberal and tolerant rhetoric of anti-homophobia. As Nylund (2004) points out, "*The Jim Rome Show* is not a simple, completely obnoxious site of monolithic masculine discourse. Rather, the show represents a complex, paradoxical, ambivalent and polyvalent text" (p. 160). That rhetorical paradox is never

more apparent than when Oakland Athletics General Manager Billy Bean, one of the very few professional male athletes to openly admit his homosexuality (though he did so after he retired), is a frequent guest on Rome's show. Most of the time when Bean is a guest, the discussion stays squarely on baseball. However, when issues involving sports and homosexuality are current topics, such as when *Out* magazine editor Brendan Lemon wrote a 2001 column detailing his gay affair with an un-named major league baseball player, Bean addresses the issues openly and frankly.

During the course of that same show, however, callers are likely to let loose with homophobic epithets and Rome himself may make at least mildly disparaging remarks or jokes about gays and lesbians in a variety of sports. The lack of attention to women's sports and lesbian athletes, further instantiates the masculine, raced privilege—whether heterosexual or homosexual—of hosts and callers. For a reader or listener to understand how and why sports talk radio can offer up such rhetorical contradictions, how programming can at once advance hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity and homophobia while at the same time advance a rhetoric of tolerance and acceptance of gay men, that reader or listener must always keep in mind that this programming is first and foremost an entertainment product, as are the conservative political talk radio shows that share the airwaves with sports talk. This entertainment does not jettison it from political valences, of course, but heightens the importance of exploring the political implications of any media deemed “entertainment.” While *The Jim Rome Show* hails itself as protective, tolerant, even “gay friendly,” this license, I would argue, is granted by a heteronormative white masculinity that *has the least the lose* in that progressive stance. Being “gay friendly,” but not lesbian or woman-friendly, is very much about shoring up

hegemonic masculinity. Again, Patricia Williams chimes in with an appropriate point, “The limp little tag hanging from my teabag reads: ‘It’s easy to be tolerant when you do not care’” (1997, p. 59).

As I conclude this discussion of gender and sports talk radio, I want to revisit the incident that launched Jim Rome into national celebrity. By calling Jim Everett “Chris,” Rome essentially feminized the very hyper-masculine pro quarterback. By reacting as he did (knocking over a table and throwing Rome to the ground in full view of television cameras), Everett in a sense reclaimed his masculinity. By playing the clip of the incident over and over again, the media both reinforced hegemonic masculinity, licensed its violent expressions, and created a new media star who today stands at the pinnacle of sports talk radio fame.

As I began this study, I envisioned sports talk radio as a place where those who were not interested in the standard electoral and cultural politics of programming like *The Rush Limbaugh Show* could come to listen and talk about something more unifying, the experience of being a sports fan. While I believe that listeners do indeed take refuge in sports talk radio for just those kinds of purposes, I also believe that this study has illustrated that sports talk radio is not apolitical. In fact, the politics of sports talk radio are concentrated in the building and maintenance of community and identity by advancing a rhetoric of regional pride through athletic accomplishment, even as it masks whiteness and mobilizes masculinity.

Throughout the country, citizens and elected officials are engaged in heated and sometimes vicious debate regarding using public financing to build sports stadiums. In most cases, getting the stadium built involves passing sales and/or property tax increases

that are politically unpopular. Many times these issues are accompanied by threats, explicit or implied, from team owners that if a new stadium is not built, the team will relocate to a city which will be willing to build them the new stadium they say they need in order to stay competitive in the ever more expensive world of professional sports.

This study has illustrated that the identity of the sports fan is directly related to how that fan creates a drama of connection to a favorite team and the community in which he lives. Logically then, sports talk radio can and does become a vehicle for the social construction of identity, based in part on what Eckstein and Delaney (2002) called “community self-esteem” and “community self consciousness” as it relates to maintaining and reinforcing identity through a community being seen, both internally and externally, as a “major league” or “big sports” city.

Because sports talk radio is a place where the emotion and dramatic enactment of a message, not the logic, plays a bigger role, the medium is tailor-made for the advancement of a political message. That message, more often than not, speaks of the pride and better quality of life one will have when professional sports are in the city you call home. It transcends the cold reality of economics and, ironically, actually helps widen the gap between rich fans and poor fans by making the prospect of seeing live sporting events even further out of the reach of many fans. New, expensive stadium always come with new, more expensive ticket prices and even stratification of fan experiences while at the games. Sports talk radio has the power to ensure that cities and fans retain a uniqueness of identity. Often, that message can include subtle manipulation and the fear of a city losing its major league reputation. As Eckstein and Delaney (2002) pointed out, “Stadium supporters in many cities often manipulated community self

esteem by targeting another urban area that had been socially constructed as inferior. People in Cleveland warned that without new professional sports stadiums, the city would be 'just like Akron.' Ballpark proponents in Minneapolis and Denver seemed worried that without new stadiums the cities would be just 'a colder version of Omaha.' Phoenix elites insisted that major league baseball would prevent Phoenix from turning into 'another Tucson' (pp. 240-241). It should be noted that all three of the cities mentioned in the above quote did ultimately build new stadiums. Sports talk radio will continue to serve as a major political voice in cities around the nation. Would that social justice—for gender, sexuality, race, and class—were as easy to build as sports stadiums in these communities.

Directions for Future Research

Partly because studies of sports talk radio are still very limited, there is tremendous potential for future research of both sports talk radio directly and of numerous other areas of our society as it relates to sports.

In broad terms, I believe it is critical that future researchers continue to examine the uniqueness of segmented audiences in qualitative studies. Engaging actively in more qualitative inquiry can continue to reveal insights that have been overlooked and underappreciated by many kinds of audiences for years. When researchers decide to examine what lies beneath the surface, a richer, fuller picture of the audience begins to take shape. That picture goes from a simple black and white snapshot of the audience in terms of something like potential buyers/clients to a more colorful illustration of how and why the audience gets connected and stays connected to an idea, issue or concept.

More specifically, one possible angle for researchers to examine is a side by side analysis of calls made to sports talk radio stations divided by gender, examining similarities and/or differences between the callers and their calls. As I pointed out previously, calls by women to this very masculine arena are often looked at as novelties. However, local host Steve Duemig was adamant in his belief that calls placed to his show by women were overwhelmingly intelligent, fact-filled and made for more stimulating programming. These studies could prove to be invaluable in illustrating the reflection of cultural trends as put forth by and through sports talk radio. Paramount among these trends, I believe, will be examinations of how hegemonic masculinity is changing and evolving in a world where gender and sexual orientation in sports is being placed under a more powerful microscope.

There is also great potential in studying “routine” callers to programs (callers that call the shows one or more times per week and whose calls make it to the air) as a vehicle for understanding how ordinary people cultivate a celebrity identity by and through their calls to talk radio stations. As in the case of *The Jim Rome Show*, many of these callers have cultivated their own celebrity. The host is no longer the only “famous” person connected with the program. By studying calls qualitatively, one can examine, for example, the concept of celebrity and how routine callers carefully and methodically construct their own celebrity through their calls to sports talk radio. Earlier in this study, I noted that two former routine callers to sports talk radio shows, Mike Trivissano, who regularly called *Pete Franklin’s Sportsline* and J.T. The Brick, a regular of *The Jim Rome Show* used the celebrity they built as callers to launch their own sports talk radio shows.

Another provocative area for potential study is located in secondary texts that are created as a result of listening to the shows. One such arena is the Internet, where you can find numerous websites which callers and fans of sports radio talk shows have created to help link them as members of a community. For example, the website LiveWithMom.com, created by fans of *The Jim Rome Show*, plays host to hundreds of regular visitors and guests each day with its various chat rooms and message boards. The website's name, LiveWithMom, is derived from an ongoing joke on Rome's show, whereby Rome constantly decries his listeners as being nothing more than unemployed low-lives who continue to live with their parents well into their adult years. Other possible arenas for qualitative inquiry include fan clubs and sports bars, especially ones that are designated, authoritatively or not, as the "official sports" bar of a certain team.¹³

Concluding Thoughts

The end of this project represents, in so many ways, a beginning. When we commit ourselves to the ideals of theoretical flexibility and when we commit ourselves to academic and social inquiry that refuses to be constrained by tradition, the results more times than not allow us to see a broader, more colorful and more sensible picture of the world we live in.

I want to stress again that this study was undertaken to help advance the case for examining the social and cultural functions and dimensions of rhetoric and its subsequent benefits in helping a wide variety of audiences understand and make sense of their uniquely human experiences. I believe it is dangerous in the extreme for anyone inside or outside the academy to indict examinations of the rhetoric of popular culture as somehow

being disrespectful of the long tradition and history of rhetorical studies or to demean or dismiss these studies as having little or no social or intellectual significance.

Whether we are experiencing Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Plato's *Phaedrus* or *The Jim Rome Show*, we are acting, thinking and constructing rhetorically when we do because we are ordering and making sense of those texts through a distinct strategy of understanding and meaning influenced by culture. In other words, we are employing rhetoric to help us understand the role of communication in society.

Projects like this also help illustrate that there are still so many texts and subtexts in the rhetoric of popular culture yet to be explored, and even when people think they know all there is to know about a text (like sports), what they can discover beyond the text will provide them with new perspectives. Again, this is not meant to dismiss or minimize any text, but rather to encourage all of us to move beyond the textual and toward the functional in terms of how we view rhetorical studies. I find it disappointing in many ways that while a text like sports has been examined in thousands of pieces of academic literature and a text like news/political talk radio has been examined in hundreds more, scarcely few academic inquiries have been made into this genre which has exploded in popularity in the past decade and a half. Through more examination of sports talk radio, more sense can be made of how and why we connect individually and culturally with sports and how as sports and technology evolve over time, we come to rely on both of them to enrich our human experience.

I discovered sports talk radio when I moved to Tampa in 1994. Since then, it has been a regular part of my drives both to and from work every day. The blend of local and national sports talk, the outright silliness of *The Jim Rome Show* combined with the much

more serious and immediate content of *The Steve Duemig Show*, has provided me with many hours of great entertainment. As I conclude this study, I want to stress that when academics begin their search for subject matter, they should begin by looking long and hard at themselves and how they make sense of the world around them. Though I certainly experienced many of the frustrations that all academics face while drafting this study, the experience was made all the more worthwhile because I never stopped being fascinated by the material I was examining. Researching and writing this study was incredibly time consuming and one of the sacrifices I made was my own experience as a sports fan. I have held season tickets to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers since 1997. Seeing the NFL live and in person on game days is one of the things I enjoy most in my life. During the fall of 2004, when this study was in full swing, I attended only one game, choosing to sell my tickets to friends and colleagues in order to stay focused on my work. Anyone who knows me knows what a huge sacrifice that was. However, what I learned about fans and sports and communication and rhetoric made that sacrifice more than worth it.

Right now, in cities and town around the nation, someone is calling a sports talk radio station for the first time. In a few years, that caller might have his or her own sports talk radio program. Right now, fans and hosts are yelling at one another to prove how right they are. Right now, a radio executive is smiling because the sports talk radio ratings have taken another jump. The wild world of sports talk is on the air.

I'm out.

Endnotes

¹ Barry's representative anecdote is this: "A person of high economic and social status patronizes a younger person of lower status for motives that seem not entirely altruistic. The younger person is radically altered and encounters difficulties adjusting to his or her new status. A break between the two people occurs, and it is healed through the alteration of the older person as well" (p. 163). He then explains that is the representative anecdote for *Pygmalion*, *My Fair Lady*, and the 1970s television show, *Diff'rent Strokes*.

² Smulyan's story bears striking similarity to the efforts of Ted Turner and Reese Schonfeld to launch CNN.

³ Donellan resurfaced in the summer of 2005 as a fill-in anchor for WDAE in Tampa, FL.

⁴ The entire article is available at

http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2004/writers/jeffri_chadiha/09/14/keyshawn/index.html

⁵ According to data provided to me by John Snyder from Arbitron in an e-mail message on February 7, 2005.

⁶ These stages are outlined in much greater detail by Avery & Ellis (1979).

⁷ Fox Sports Radio Networks currently syndicates "Fox Game Time with Craig Shemon and James Washington." Washington is African-American, however it should be noted that Washington, a former NFL player, does not have his own program and is billed second following Shemon.

⁸ See Callahan, T. Racism at bat, No monument for Jackie. *Time*, 20 Apr 1987, p. 62.

⁹ See Ballard, S. Scorecard: An oddsmaker's odd views. *Sports Illustrated*, 25 Jan 1988, p. 7.

¹⁰ As reported on CNN.com. See <http://www.cnn.com/US/9704/21/fuzzy>

¹¹ As reported by Philadelphia television station WPVI. See

http://abclocal.go.com/wpvi/sports/10012003_sp_limbaugh-mcnabb.html

¹² Though he made the comment in the 1970's while deejaying a Top 40 music show in Pittsburgh under the name "Jeff Christie", not on his now famous conservative political talk show.

¹³ For example, fans of the Philadelphia Eagles who live in the greater Tampa Bay area can go to the website <http://www.tampadelphia.com>, where they can find that fellow Philadelphia Eagles fans gather weekly at a hotel bar called The Players Sports Lounge to watch Eagles games and enjoy one another's company.

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