

Summary of presentation by Willy Daunic, host of The Sports Zone on 104.5 The Zone Media Minds Speaker Series, November 14, 2005

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Daunic came to Vanderbilt in 1989 on a basketball scholarship. He indicated that his playing career at Vandy has been the subject of much ribbing by his radio co-hosts, as he averaged 1.7 points per game as a role-playing guard on the team from 1989-1992. Willy also played baseball for the Commodores all four years of his collegiate career, and was drafted in the 25<sup>th</sup> round by the Toronto Blue Jays, for whom he played 2 seasons of minor league ball. It was during his senior season at Vanderbilt that Willy discovered a career path in broadcast journalism. He chose not to play basketball his senior season, and instead provided statistical assistance for the radio coverage crew. It was there he gained valuable insight into what goes into a broadcast, and he made personal connections that would lead to a career path in broadcast radio sports. Willy jokingly referred to being born with the “sickness” of sports fanaticism, and he has always had a passion for sports. He also spoke of the “less than minimum wage” conditions under which he agreed to his first job in radio sports journalism. Mr. Daunic indicated that he was lucky in that he had good mentors around him to guide him, tutor him on his on-air delivery, and he was patient and willing to do what was asked of him in the beginning of his career.

## **PREPARATION**

Willy outlined a preparation grid that he and his co-hosts use at 104.5 The Zone. The grid consists of the days of the week at the top, with the hours of their sports show at the right side. While they have weekly scheduled slots that are constant (i.e. The Drew Bennett Show on Thursdays at 6 p.m.), a good portion of the week is determined at the weekly production meeting, held every Monday prior to the show.

Willy also indicated that a sports talk show host must know more and have vital information concerning each team in his purview. To the casual fan, sports talk show hosts may look like sports gods, all knowing. But the key, Willy said, is to have something even that the super fans will find interesting, not just give them the scores, or something they could read elsewhere or watch on ESPN. That’s where developing a rapport with players, team personnel, coaches, etc. is invaluable. He also cited sportspages.com as a valuable preparation tool.

## **INTERVIEWING**

Mr. Daunic’s take on this subject was simple: Listening is the key to good interviewing. Willy’s shared a personal anecdote of being new to the business and having 10 prepared questions all ready for your interview subject, and being so wrapped up in how good his questions were that he failed to listen to any of the responses. Daunic came to understand that it’s in the responses that the opportunity for follow-up questions will arise, and sometimes you will get something unexpected, or a “scoop”, if you just listen and ask great follow-up questions.

## **OBJECTIVITY**

Willy's advice on this topic was to not hide who you are or become something you're not, but not to be a "homer", either. As a radio broadcast professional, he must remain credible, even if he has an interest in the team. Consistency aids in credibility, so Willy tries to treat every team and every situation with a same sense of evenness. Even though he's a Vanderbilt alum, he tries to cover Vanderbilt with the same objectivity he provides UT, Florida, etc. He indicated that this is a tough tight rope to walk, but he must stay true to what the listeners expect of him.

## **PLAY-BY-PLAY TIPS**

Once again, Mr. Daunic's answer is in the preparation. He advises to study the teams in advance, understand the players, coaches, and the team's history, not just the year they are currently having. He suggested listening to other play-by-play announcers to gain insight on how it's done, but you must be careful not to mimic other announcers. He also differentiated between radio and television play by play. On radio, you must paint the picture, so it's vital that you give details of the game, but also be mindful of the game within the game (score, time remaining, substitutions, etc.)

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

During Q&A, Willy spoke of the advantages of radio over print, in that they have the immediacy angle. They not only should cover stories as they unfold, but the medium demands that they do so in order to compete with satellite radio, cable t.v., and print. Willy also spoke of the surge in sports talk, specifically here in Nashville. When he began his sports talk radio career, they basically covered high school sports, some college, and little professional or national sports news. As the market began to change, the Nashville sports talk radio scene began to change as well. Willy gave specifics of how certain major sports stories drove the demand for sports talk radio.