John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast. I'm John Boccacino, Senior Internal Communications Specialist at Syracuse University.

Bob Costas:

If I was throwing the rubber ball off a wall and imagining a game in my head as all kids did, I heard Mel Allen or Red Barber or Vin Scully. If I was shooting baskets, I heard Marty Glickman and then his protege, Marv Albert. And part of the reason why a big part why I went to Syracuse is because Marty Glickman and Marv Albert had gone to Syracuse. And so, too by then had Dick Stockton and Len Berman and others.

And since then, it's become a list too long to count. It's Sportscaster U. To me, a game wasn't a game without those great and often melodic voices that gave the game lyrics and melody almost that quintessential example of that is Vin Scully with the great lyrics and this melodic and rhythmic case and delivery that he had that was perfectly suited to baseball. That wasn't a partial influence. It was a major influence in me wanting to become a sports broadcaster.

John Boccacino:

Well, today folks on this episode of the Cues Conversations Podcast, we are honored and thrilled to welcome Bob Costas, the legendary sports broadcaster and inductee into both the Baseball Hall of Fame and the WAER Hall of Fame. He is joining us on the podcast. Bob, thank you for making the time. How's life treating you these days?

Bob Costas:

Thank you, John. Not bad. Relatively easy stretch here until the baseball season starts once again. So, no complaints at all.

John Boccacino:

Having attended school at Syracuse, this is a tough time of year. There's snow on the ground. People are leery of the winter season. But there's really a sense of optimism with spring. And one of the best rights of spring as the start of the baseball season. How excited are you for the national pastime of baseball to get back up and running this year?

Bob Costas:

You know John, I've always been excited since I was a kid, always excited for spring training and the start of the real season. But this year more so than in recent seasons, more so than any recent season, I can recall because of the rule changes which were overdue. Baseball really went about this in a methodical and diligent way. They tested it out in the minor leagues and they also did something that I thought was very smart. They superimposed the pitch clock over classic games of the past, not games from the very distant path, but from the '80s and '90s.

And they found that almost always the great pitchers of that era and the hitters that they pitched to beat the clock. It didn't exist, but the clock in their head and the natural rhythm and pace of the game almost always had a pitch delivered within 15 seconds with no one on base and within 20 seconds with a man or more than one man on base and sometimes multiple pitches within that timeframe.

So, it's easily doable. And in spring training, just as was the case in the minor leagues, it's cutting about 25 minutes off the average time of a game. So, it isn't just the length of the game, it's the pace of the game. And by outlawing shifts, not only does the game look the way it always has looked, the kind of symmetry that you have with the outfielders, more or less being where they're supposed to be and the infield, there's two of them on either side of second base. But the most important thing is that through spring training, ground ball hits are up significantly.

So, that's going to increase offense. It puts more runners on base. The larger bases, people have said they look like pizza boxes. And yeah, it's a little weird, but the effect is along with limiting the number of pickoffs to two per at bat, guys on first base during this at bat, you can only throw over a couple of times that will increase stolen base attempts.

What surveys of fans reveal is that, yeah, they like home runs, but they want the ball in play. They want exciting plays like the stolen base or the ball hit in the gap, or a guy trying to go from first to third, or score from first on a double.

So, I think all those things are going to be more part of baseball. It's kind of a back to the future thing where we go back not to the dead ball era, not to when games were on TV and black and white, but to the '80s and '90s, to the appropriate and pleasing leisurely pace that baseball has always had, but not the too often plotting lethargic pace it's had in recent years, which is not good for the game and certainly not good for the business of baseball.

John Boccacino:

I'm glad to hear as a baseball purist like yourself and someone who is one of the world's most passionate fans and foremost experts in the sport, because I was wondering how a purist and a traditionalist like yourself viewed some of the changes. And it's great that baseball is willing to make these decisions and do a lot of research to study ways to improve the game because it really felt like baseball had a problem with pace of play. And also with the loss of small ball. Like you mentioned, the return of stolen bases and the hit and run. So, do you think this is going to really help bring baseball back to maybe make it a more entertaining product for younger fans possibly to get into it?

Bob Costas:

Yes. I'm sure that it will do that. To what extent, remains to be seen. But it absolutely will help. When it comes to small ball though, now that we have the universal DH, maybe we'll see more hit and run stuff now, maybe certainly we'll see more stolen bases. But I believe that the sacrifice bunt is on the endangered species list because no more pitchers batting.

And it used to be incumbent upon pitchers, they didn't all do it, but they should have all been able to do it to lay down a bunt. And in the National League more than the American League, there were situations where you might bunt. Now, you'll see a guy occasionally bunt for a hit, but the sacrifice, you'll see it now and then, but it will not nearly be as frequent a part of the game as it used to be.

John Boccacino:

It's been said that baseball has really changed from being a national sport to having regional teams, regional markets, and people are interested in the team in their town, but it's not as rabid of a sport as it used to be. Like when you were growing up when New York City was the heartbeat of baseball with Jackie Robinson, with Willie Mays, with Mickey Mantle and these powerhouse teams, when you look at baseball as we currently stand, how would you describe the state of this sport that you love so much?

Bob Costas:

Well, everything is relative. It's still very profitable, some $9 billion in revenue per year and growing. And obviously it must be a growth industry in some sense for the owners to be giving out the ever larger contracts, but they keep giving out year after year. So, in that sense, it's healthy. And if we look at it historically, teams used to brag when they passed the one million mark in annual attendance.

Now even the worst teams easily pass that. Most teams go past two million, some teams go past three million. So, on a local level, with some exceptions, on a local level, it's generally doing well. And regionally, as you said, John, the regional sports networks are often the highest rated programming with baseball during the summer. In St. Louis, for example, that is the top-rated program, Cardinal games throughout the spring and summer. But at the same time, there are some regional sports networks now that are in trouble.

And this is something more for CNBC and the Sports Business Journal and for me to unravel, but there are a handful of teams, the Reds, the Pirates, surprisingly, the Astros and a few others where the local RSNs, the regional sports networks are collapsing and declaring bankruptcy.

And baseball has had to move in for this season to put the games on the MLB network, so that if you're an Astro fan or a Red fan or a Pirate fan, then you'll still be able to see the games. But that source of revenue, unless they can figure out a way to replace it, that source of revenue, which in many cases is significant, is going to dry up for some teams, not for the Yankees on the YES network, not for the Red Sox on NESN, but in some parts of the major leagues, there's going to be a shortfall when it comes to revenue.

How exactly that's going to play out? I'm not sure. But to your initial question, is baseball still successful on a regional basis and a local basis? By and large, the answer to that is yes, and in some cases a resounding yes, but where we can see that it's not what it used to be is in the national ratings. The game of the week doesn't exist anymore.

Of course, the landscape of media and people in Syracuse and associated with the Newhouse School understand all this. The media landscape is so much different and so fractionalized compared to what it once was. But back in the '80s when Tony Kubek and I and Vin Scully and Joe Garagiola were doing the NBC Baseball Game of the Week, sometimes those matchups would get ratings equal to primetime shows and ratings that would be well above a successful primetime show today.

Now, there might be a Saturday game on Fox. It's no knock on the way they produce it, but it's just part of a massive amount of entertainment that's out there and baseball product that's out there. It used to be that most teams didn't televise that many games. They might televise 30 or 40 road games, no home games.

So, the baseball game of the week on Saturday was your one chance to see Johnny Bench face Fernando Valenzuela, unless you were in Cincinnati or Los Angeles. And by the time you got to the postseason, which was not as expansive as it is now, LCS and then the World Series, those games were all on network television. They were on ABC, and they were on NBC with familiar voices. And by the time you got to the World Series, the audience was massive for those games.

Game seven of the 1986 World Series between the Red Sox and the Mets went up against Monday Night Football because the Sunday game seven as it was scheduled, was rained out. The football game, got a rating of something like eight or nine, and the baseball game got a rating of 30. The baseball game got triple the audience of a Monday night football game.

Now, sadly, regular season football games, often out rate World Series games. And I don't know what baseball can do about that in terms of restoring its national luster, but you're right, that regionally and locally, it's doing better than okay.

John Boccacino:

As a lifelong Cub fan, I'm so glad you brought up the game of the week because personally, one of my favorite memories growing up was hearing you called Ryne Sandberg game when he blasted two game time, and then the game winning hits against the St. Louis Cardinals off of Hall of Famer, Bruce Sutter, and the energy at Wrigley Field was palpable. And I know that you did such a great job with those broadcasts. What do you think it is about the sport of baseball that lends itself so well to you as your forte when it comes to sportscasting?

Bob Costas:

Well, I've been lucky enough to be associated with a lot of things. I loved the NBA on NBC in the '90s, and I was part of a dozen different Olympics for NBC. But when it comes to baseball, I've always had an affinity for the game and the nature of it. It's not supposed to, as we've talked about earlier, it's not supposed to plot along, but it is supposed to move by and large at a nice leisurely pace, which allows for storytelling and anecdotes and background information and exchanges, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious, between the play-by-play guy and his broadcast partner.

So, it just lends itself to that type of broadcasting. There are guys who are very, very good baseball announcers who aren't all that good at other sports. And the reverse, guys who were terrific on basketball and football, but just never quite had the rhythm, even if they were fans, never quite had the rhythm of a classic baseball call. It's just a different animal in so many ways, and it relies on history for its appeal. You shouldn't get lost in it.

And earlier you said that I was a purist or a traditionalist, and that applies to some extent because I understand that tradition and history are more important in baseball than in other sports. But baseball has always evolved through the years in one way or another. The question is, do you do it thoughtfully? And as I said earlier, I think these changes now are thoughtful changes that should work. I've never been opposed to change. I just want to make sure that that change respects what makes baseball different, even as it modernizes.

John Boccacino:

And you're spot on. The numbers in baseball used to mean something. I think they still do mean something more than any other sports. I mean, there's a famous quote from the Ken Burns documentary name who had the number of rushing yards that Emmitt Smith retired with. Or the number of points that LeBron James will finish with as the NBA's leading scorer. But people can tell you that 7, 14 and 7, 55 and 61, those numbers used to carry a lot of clout.

Bob Costas:

I think it might have been me who said that on Ken Burns baseball documentary.

John Boccacino:

Okay. I really quoted you on the podcast.

Bob Costas:

No wonder it's such an outstanding quote. But you're right, of course, that nobody knew Kareem Abdul Jabbar's exact number until LeBron got so close that we knew how many points he needed in a given game to pass it. And as great as Jim Brown was, nobody knew what his total was and then what Walter Payton's was when he went past it, and then Emmitt Smith went past that.

But in baseball, there are all these numbers that really have meant a lot, which is why the steroid era is such a problem ongoing for baseball. We know, and I don't want to get too deeply into this because I've talked about it a million times, Barry Bonds is one of the greatest all-round players on his natural merits who has ever played the game in any era.

But having said that, his 73 home runs, which is the single season record, and his 762 career home runs are inauthentic numbers. He was a great player who became a superhuman player late in his career when he should have been declining instead of surging past anything that he or anybody else had ever done in any era. We know that that's inauthentic. So, too is Mark McGwire's 70 home runs and the three times that Sammy Sosa hit more than 60.

So, what that did to the record books in a sport where history matters more than any other is a problem. Most knowledgeable fans have a mental asterisk next to it. People talk about, should we put one in the record book? You start doing that and it gets too complicated. There's too many things that you'd have to take a look at. What teams had the most steroid guys? Should we put an asterisk next to their playoff position or if they won the World Series? I think most knowledgeable fans understand it for what it is.

And part of the proof of that is all the hoopla that's surrounded Aaron Judge this past season. Somebody could say that statistically, wait a minute, 62 is just a new Yankee record, since Ruth hit 60 and Maris 61, and it's a new American League record, but it's 11 short of the Major League record. Yeah, that's right.

But fans understood that what Bonds, McGwire and Sosa did, 60 home run seasons in a four-year cluster between '98 and 2001, a four season cluster when in the entire history of baseball prior to and since there had been half that many three and then barely so, 60, 61, 62, knowledgeable, fair-minded baseball fans put what Judge did in a different category and they were correct to do so.

John Boccacino:

I mentioned earlier that you were a huge Yankee fan growing up, and again, really such a golden age of baseball. And I mentioned Mickey Mantle. I want to get your thoughts, if you will, because people love to compare Mickey to Mike Trout and say that Mike is kind of the modern day version of a healthy Mickey Mantle, what he was putting up in his prime, but you got to see it firsthand just how big of a Mantle fan were you and how special of a player was he?

Bob Costas:

Well, everybody in my neighborhood in New York was a Yankee fan. When I came to understand baseball, or at least have a child's understanding of it, I'm maybe seven years old. It's the late 1950s. And the Dodgers and Giants have already left for the West Coast, and the Mets don't exist yet.

So, the baseball you're seeing and hearing is the Yankees. And they're not only the best team in the American League winning the pennant almost every year, but Mickey Mantle is the greatest player in the American League. And a lot of younger fans, when they just look at the raw lifetime totals, they say, "Well, sure, obviously Mickey Mantle was a great player. He's a first rank hall of famer, but he's not nearly as great as Hank Aaron or Willie Mays." And that's true if you're talking about career achievements.

But in the prime of his career, if you take the best 10 or 12 seasons of his career up to let's say, up to and through 1964, he's right there. Offensively, he's right there, and in some cases, has an edge over Willie Mays or Hank Aaron.

Now, Mays was the greatest defensive center fielder, arguably in baseball history, and he was an electric base runner. But if you're just talking about offensively, all the modern analytics are very favorable to Mickey Mantle in his prime. So, that's how good he was. Triple Crown winner in 1956. Didn't just lead the league. He led the majors in all three of those categories. And is on base percentage, his home runs per time at bat, all that stuff, the slugging percentages, all of that stuff is very favorable to him.

And the old-time baseball people say that when he was healthy, and you're not talking about steroid guys, pre steroids, he might have been the best combination of raw speed and raw power that they had ever seen. Now, Willie Mays, as I said, is the greatest all round player I've ever seen, but Mantle was one of the most dynamic and appealing to fans baseball players who's ever lived.

John Boccacino:

You had these legendary Hall of Fame broadcasters who were calling their games, and Mel Allen and Red Barber, so many great iconic voices on the transistor radio calling the game or being broadcast through the TV. When that medium made its way into the sport, did that influence of both the great baseball teams and the great baseball broadcasters, how did that kind of bring you into the world of maybe being a sportscaster and a play-by-play guy down the road?

Bob Costas:

Very much so. I couldn't separate those voices from the games themselves. If I was throwing a rubber ball off a wall and imagining a game in my head as all kids did, I heard Mel Allen or Red Barber or Vin Scully. If I was shooting baskets, I heard Marty Glickman and then his protege, Marv Albert. And part of the reason why a big part why I went to Syracuse is because Marty Glickman and Marv Albert had gone to Syracuse. And so, too by then had Dick Stockton and Len Berman and others. And since then, it's become a list too long to count. It's Sportscaster U, but a large reason is the alumni and the reputation that the university built up.

So, to me, a game wasn't a game without those great and often melodic voices that gave the game lyrics and melody, almost that quintessential example of that is Vin Scully with the great lyrics and this melodic and rhythmic case and delivery that he had that was perfectly suited to baseball. So, yes, that wasn't a partial influence, it was a major influence in me wanting to become a sports broadcaster.

John Boccacino:

And how did you go about from someone who has the auditory pleasure of hearing these iconic broadcasters to developing and cultivating your own voice and your own style, how did you find out who and what you wanted to be on the air?

Bob Costas:

Another very good question. Back then, late '60s when I was in high school, high schools didn't have broadcasting facilities. And if you wanted to record something, you got an old school cassette recorder, maybe you turned the sound down on the television and you tried to do play by play over the pictures, and you sounded terrible both because you were young and because that's really a weird way to try and call a game. You got no statistic. You have no real view of the field or the diamond or the court.

So, I never really did any broadcasting at all until I got to Syracuse as an 18-year-old freshman. And my first thought, John, after I did a sportscast on WAER and heard the tape back, my honest first thought was, I am doomed. I've got to rethink my whole plan. There's no way in the world that I can be a 10th as good as the people that I grew up listening to and wanting to emulate.

My voice was very thin. There were still vestiges of a New York accent. The pace and the rhythm were anything like what I imagined a good broadcast should be. But I guess I learned pretty quickly and you're going to have more of a maturation curve between your late teens and your early 20s than some other four-year cluster of seasons and years in your life.

So, I guess I got better, significantly better with all the reps that I had at WAER. And then by the time I was a senior, I landed a job at WSYR in Syracuse, calling minor league hockey games on the radio. Being a hockey announcer was not my ultimate ambition, but I was smart enough to know that you take any job early on that gives you experience and gives you a notch on your resume.

So, by that time, by the time I was in my early 20s, I certainly wasn't as good as I hoped that I became at some point, but I was good enough that some professors at Syracuse told me that I had a chance if I worked at it, but I had the potential to be good. And so, at that point, I had enough confidence to pursue it.

John Boccacino:

What helps too, coming to Syracuse, not everybody can get the experience working with the Syracuse Blazers and having a story that is inspired by the movie Slap Shot. I'm not sure if our audience knows the full context of this great story, but do you mind diving in a little bit to your encounter with Bill Goldthorpe and the inspiration for a great hockey movie Slap Shot?

Bob Costas:

Slap Shot's, one of those movies like Major League in baseball that appeals across the generations and it still shows up on cable TV. So, it's entirely possible that someone who's 20 years old has seen Slap Shot and the character Ogie Oglethorpe is directly modeled on Bill Harpo Goldthorpe of the Syracuse Blazers. And he and I were rookies in the Eastern Hockey League in the '73-'74 season together.

And Goldie, who is truly a legendary figure in minor league circles, was arrested by his own account more than 40 times over the course of his life. He was banned from six different leagues, including a senior league at one point, which would be a bit more gentlemanly. And even though he had ability, he was a winger, he could skate, he could score at least at the minor league level. But his primary thing was that he was an enforcer. It was a bad game if he didn't have at least one fight.

And I think he more or less judged people based on whether or not they could win a fight in a bar, in an alley, or better yet on the ice. And he correctly assessed that I didn't really fit that model. So, he and I had an uneasy relationship. I had no problem with him pretty much, but he seemed to have a problem with me.

So, we are on the bus, and of course it was a bus league. If you played in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, you got on the bus at 8:00 in the morning, you stopped at some greasy spoon somewhere so the team could have lunch, seven-hour ride. You wound up at the Syracuse War Memorial, late afternoon. Players dressed, they played the game and they got back on the bus and got back to Syracuse at dawn. That was the way it was, a classic bus league.

So, we're on the bus and we're rattling down the highway and I'm sitting there, and this is what I would do. I'd prepare for the games and I'd also be reading textbooks or writing term papers because I'd have to go to an 8:00 class on no sleep probably when we got back.

And so, I happened to be on this occasion reading the New York Times and he's peering over my shoulder. And the very fact that I'm reading the New York Times must have enraged him. So, he reaches over my shoulder and he snatches the paper out of my hand and he looks around and makes sure that everyone on the bus is watching and that he rips it to shreds and lets it fall on the floor of the bus, like New Year's Eve confetti. And I think I have to have some kind of response to this.

So, I look up at him and I say, "Hey, Goldie, don't be jealous. I'll teach you to read." And few of the players laughed at that, but he was not among those who were amused. And he yanks me out of my seat and he slams me up against the wall of a moving bus. And he reaches up into the rack and pulls down a hacksaw. And a few people, when they hear the story, they say, "What is a hacksaw doing on the bus?" Well, players then had to be their own equipment man, and they used the hacksaw to trim their sticks.

So, the hacksaws out there. And he puts the hacksaw underneath my chin. Now I know that he has no intention of really decapitating me, but I also know that he's not the sort of person who would take into account all the dynamics of this situation. What if the bus hits a pothole or swerved on the road to avoid a deer, then what happens?

So, at this point, I can see out of the corner of my eye trembling as I am that sort of a makeshift SWAT team is forming, coming toward the back of the bus from the front. The coaches actually, there was only one coach and a trainer, the coach and the trainer sat up front and the veteran players sat up front. So, the veterans, the more mature people are moving toward the back of the bus saying, "Goldie, Goldie, put Bob down, put the hacksaw down." And eventually, I guess they talked him down, because he released both me and the hacksaw. And well, what could I do? I went and sat back down.

But after that, our relationship improved dramatically, because I guess his own way win some respect by at least standing up for yourself. Thank god he didn't want do it with fist because you would've killed me. But anyway, after that, thing's improved.

And then fast forward decades, he writes a memoir with a collaborator, he writes a memoir, and he asked me to write the foreword. And so, I did. And so, we're immortalized together between hard covers.

John Boccacino:

That's a great story. And I think I can only imagine the scene on the bus. That now he's not somebody I'd want to be messing with, Bob.

Bob Costas:

No. That's just a mugshot. And I guess there were many since he was arrested more than 40 times, just from the neck up, his actual visage was much more frightening than the guy who played him as Ogie Oglethorpe in the movie.

John Boccacino:

And it's really exciting because you're a student, so you mentioned having to go ride the bus back to class afterwards, and you're taking your exams or you're doing your work here with Newhouse. I mean, what I loved about your story was you really went out and accomplished what you wanted to accomplish to reach for your dreams. And you've had this Hall of Fame career. Do you ever look back on it and kind of pinch yourself a little bit at just how well and how far you've been able to take this career?

I mean, you come from being a kid who adores Mickey Mantle to giving his eulogy when Mickey passes away to getting inducted into the hall, just how crazy has this path been for you?

Bob Costas:

I've often had to reflect how fortunate I've been. My objective was to become good enough to maybe one day be the radio voice of a Major League baseball team. And then maybe in the off season, call basketball games or something. I thought about radio.

Television wasn't really my objective. And my first job when I left Syracuse was on one of the great radio stations, 50,000 watt KMOX in St. Louis. And radio broadcasters then, including the longtime voice of the Cardinals, Jack Buck, were among the most prominent people in the industry. Radio still had a certain kind of primacy.

But first CBS and then NBC took some note of me and when I wound up at NBC, at first it's to call basketball games and football games play by play. And then Bryant Gumbel, who was a prodigy, one of the greatest natural broadcasters I've ever seen, not so much as a play-by-play man, but as a studio host, both news and sports, he goes from sports to the Today Show.

And they say to me, and I'd only been there like two years, we want you to replace Bryant as the host of the NFL show. And I say, "Guys, I've never hosted a studio show." And they say, "You can do it." And they just throw me in it and I had to sink or swim.

But all those things that I wound up doing, hosting the football, hosting the NBA on NBC, and especially hosting the Olympics, I never thought about that. I admired Jim McKay, but I never saw him as someone I would emulate. I thought of Vin Scully, I thought of Mel Allen and Red Barber like you said, or Marv Albert. And I never thought that someone would ask me to do things outside of sports, like the late night show I used to do on NBC in the '80s and '90s following David Letterman.

And there were offers that do other things outside sports that I didn't do, 60 Minutes and other things like that. Nightline, after Ted Koppel retired, another Syracuse guy, Ted Koppel. I didn't wind up accepting those offers, but they were very flattering.

And I guess I found out that what I was able to do, at least reasonably well, was greater than my own sense of myself or larger than what my initial ambitions were. So, again, it's not just the person, it's the circumstances. Maybe I had a little bit of ability, but I just found myself in fortunate circumstances and I was able to make the most of them.

John Boccacino:

With such a diverse portfolio and resume from covering 12 Olympiads, the World Series, the Super Bowl, I mean, you called Michael Jordan's championship winning shot over Byron Russell in the '98 NBA Finals. What kind of stands out to you? What are some of your favorite moments from being a play-by-play man?

Bob Costas:

Well, this is a question I've been asked before. As a play-by-play man, it would be the Jordan shot, not just because it was an exciting ending to an NBA Finals taking a one-point deficit and turning it into a one point victory. A game that wound up '87, '86, and Michael Jordan scored 45 of the 87 points, a genuinely heroic performance. And he literally took over the last two minutes of the game. Offensively and defensively, he just completely took over crunch time of that game.

The other two that I mentioned, because I've been asked this question before, actually involved me as a host, not a play by play man. Game one of the 1988 World Series, the dramatic Kirk Gibson home run pinch hitting off Dennis Eckersley to win the game for the Underdog Dodgers at Dodgers Stadium. It was

so theatrical that it reminded me of Robert Redford's at Badass Roy Hobbs in the last scene of The Natural.

And in fact, before game two, the NBC producers intercut Redford's at bat with Gibson's at bat, and it was eerie how similar the two appeared to be. So, it was so dramatic to be part of that. Vin Scully called it on television and Jack Buck had a great call on radio two of the best calls ever in baseball history. My role was as the pregame and postgame host.

But just to be in proximity to that, it's one of my great baseball memories. And the other that comes from the Olympics is Muhammad Ali lighting the torch at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. It was such a surprise and so unexpected. They only rehearsed it one time at 3:00 in the morning. There were maybe a dozen people on the planet who knew that it was going to be Mohammed and Dick Enberg and I were not among them.

Dick Ebersol, who ran NBC Sports, it was actually his idea. He suggested it to the Atlanta organizers who at first were reluctant. They said at least one of them said, "He may be a hero in some parts of the country, but down south he's still a draft Dodger to us." And Dick Ebersol said, "No, you got it wrong. Things have changed. This'll work." And he was resoundingly correct and he told Dick Enberg and me, "I'm not going to tell you who he or she is, but you'll recognize the person as soon as you see him or her. And I want your reaction to be as spontaneous as the people in the stadium."

And it still gives me goosebumps to think about him stepping out of the shadow already 20 years before his death, greatly afflicted by his Parkinson's trembling as he was, a poignant figure when once he had been among the most dynamic figures in the world, let alone in sports. And everybody in the stadium just about got it. It was a great moment of reconciliation between him and the American public. And he said afterwards, "I feel as if I was born again that night." It was just an incredible moment that you didn't have to know anything about sports to truly appreciate.

John Boccacino:

Such a powerful example of the impact that sports and athletics plays in just providing real world experiences of humanity and the good of people and the thrill of competition. And I loved hearing your recall of some of the great moments you had as both an announcer for play-by-play and as a studio host. I did want to transition just a little bit further back the memory dial for Syracuse. Any great memories of going to games at Archbold or anything on campus that really stands out to you?

Bob Costas:

Well, I went to a few games at Archbold Stadium, which at that time was the oldest ongoing stadium in division one football anywhere in the country. I think it opened in 1909. So, you definitely had a sense that the entire history of Syracuse football was there. And Ben Schwartzwalder was still the coach when I got there in 1970.

And I went to games at Manley Field House where I think Syracuse had something like a 60-game winning streak before Georgetown beat them in the very last game that was played at Manley Field House before they went to the Carrier Dome. And one of the beauties of WAER was that the student broadcasters got to work the games. So, you'd do half of a football game and then you transitioned in the second half. One of your classmates would do the play-by-play and you'd be his color man and statistician.

And we were pretty much terrible, but we're learning how to do it. Same thing with basketball. And we'd go on the road. If Syracuse played at St. John's or Fordham, we'd go on the road and it was a big

adventure. It was just a great, great adventure. And what you learned in the classroom was important, but you were also around like-minded people.

WAER was a prefab then, a World War II prefab at the foot of Mount Olympus across from the gym. And so, it's kind of a ramshackle thing, but it was exciting. You were on the air and there was an energy to it, and you're kind of comparing notes with people whose background and interest is similar to your own.

Now Newhouse is so much more sophisticated. Newhouse 2 was just opening when I was leaving Syracuse and now there's a Newhouse three and the facilities, both radio and television and WAER is a much more sophisticated setup now than it once was back then. Many of these facilities are better than the facilities at most commercial stations around the country. So, what the present students are getting, I guess is a more high level experience, but I don't think they could ever get a better emotional experience than we got back in the early '70s.

John Boccacino:

Well Bob, I have to say this has been an absolute pleasure and a privilege having you here on the Cues Conversations Podcast. As a diehard lifelong baseball fan, I'd like to thank you for everything you do to promote the sport and everything you do for Sportscasting and for Syracuse University. You're a proud alumnus. And I know you'll do nothing but great work moving forward, of course with the work with MLB Network, with your appearances on CNN and hopefully you get a chance to broadcast play-by-play as many games as you feel comfortable with.

Bob Costas:

Thanks, John. I'm kind of in an emeritus role now, not retired, but not doing nearly as much inventory as I once did, which is just the way I want it. Keep my hand in a little bit, but not as much as it used to be. The way I've taken to is putting it is, at this point I'm a show pony, not a plow horse. Mike Tirico's doing almost all the things I used to do, and he's doing it brilliantly.

And you asked about a Syracuse connection. We established a Bob Costas scholarship for Newhouse students in the mid-1980s, and the very first recipient in 1987 was Mike Tirico. And I knew then that he was a precociously talented kid. I had no way of knowing how much that talent would develop and he'd become one of the premier sports broadcasters in the country. But that's a cool thing.

And to know Ian Eagle and then his mini-me, Noah Eagle, who looks exactly like him, this wunderkind himself, he's already the radio voice of the LA Clippers and he does other stuff as well. So, there's like a generational thing.

I look around and I see all these Syracuse people, and if I or Sean McDonough or Mike Tirico or Ian, if we've been a bit of an inspiration to them the way Marv and Marty Glickman were to me, then it's kind of a cool thing. It's a generational forever orange thing that's an important part of my life.

John Boccacino:

It's really touching to hear you say that. It's also appropriate given the fact that you were the first Marty Glickman Award for Leadership and Sports Media recipient by Newhouse. So, everything really comes full circle. I know you have to get running. It has been such an honor having you on and Bob, keep up the great work.

Bob Costas:

Thank you, John. A pleasure to be with you.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast. My name is John Boccacino, signing off for the 'Cuse Conversations Podcast.