

Ecker succeeds Bob Brooks at KMRY sports

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 08 July 2016 12:40 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 July 2016 04:57



Nobody remembers who replaced Lou Gehrig at first base for the New York Yankees after the "Iron Horse" had to retire. And few people probably remember who replaced Cal Ripken for the Baltimore Orioles when his legendary streak came to an end.

Someday, I might be the answer to a trivia question like that: Who succeeded Bob Brooks as the sports director at KMRY after Brooksie passed away following eight decades as a broadcasting legend?

Rick Sellers and Eric Walker, my new bosses at KMRY, have decided to give me a chance as the "new kid" who will deliver the sports in Brooksie's old 10-minute time slots at 4:50 p.m. and 5:50 p.m., Monday through Friday, at 1450 AM and 93.1 FM. I'm excited and somewhat apprehensive about the new assignment, but there are many good people at the station who will help guide me through.

I've been a print and digital journalist all my life, including 27 years at The Gazette and the past 5 1/2 years with the Metro Sports Report, so the thought of sitting behind a microphone and talking for 10 minutes at a time is a little daunting.

Fortunately, there should be lots to talk about. We'll cover the local sports scene as thoroughly as possibly, including the Hawkeyes and all your favorite teams, and we'll also keep you posted on what's happening with the Cubs and the pros.

We'll cover the Kernels, RoughRiders, Titans and Rampage. We'll cover Kirkwood, Coe and Mount Mercy. We'll cover the local high schools. We'll attend special events like the Zach Johnson Classic and probably much more.

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Rest assured, there will not be any major changes with our work here at the Metro Sports Report. The two jobs at KMRY and the MSR should mesh together nicely, and the two companies plan to help each other as much as possible. I'll announce a few developments at KMRY on the MSR website, such as special guests and special shows, and KMRY plans to provide a link to the website.

KMRY is primarily a classic hits music station, but it also has comprehensive news and sports reports. And the KMRY theme of "LOCAL, LOCAL, LOCAL" fits right into the Metro Sports Report credo as well.

Few people may realize this, but KMRY is the No. 2 sports station in Cedar Rapids now that WMT has stopped broadcasting live events. WMT is part of the Hawkeye Network, of course, but the station ended its live coverage of prep events several years ago.

KGYM, which is an all-sports station, is No. 1 in our market with its coverage of high school events, but KMRY is certainly No. 2 with its broadcasts of the Cedar Rapids Kernels and Xavier High School. Brooksie had a big following as well, and now it's my job to continue his great work and perhaps expand in a few directions.

Bob was a good friend of mine for many years. We traveled together a few times to University of Iowa events when I was covering the Hawkeyes for The Gazette, and more recently we'd chat at Kernels games or at high school events.

Bob was always gracious and he interviewed me a few times for his reports for KMRY and Mediacom, helping me promote the Metro Sports Report or any other project I might have. All the tributes you've read and heard about Bob are absolutely true. He was a first-class gentleman and a pro who cared a great deal about the teams, the coaches and the athletes. It was always about them, not him.

My favorite Bob Brooks story involves the time he grabbed a rare interview with Jackie Robinson. This was in 1947, when Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers were playing the Cubs at Wrigley Field. Robinson had just broken the "color barrier" in Major League baseball and Bob was a young college student and broadcaster at Iowa.

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Bob and a few friends drove to Chicago for the game. During batting practice, Bob went onto the field and noticed that Robinson was sitting by himself in the Dodgers dugout with nobody to talk to.

Undaunted, Bob approached Robinson and politely asked for an interview. Robinson seemed eager to talk, so they chatted for a few minutes with Bob recording every word on his primitive recording device.

Near the end of the interview, an official with the Dodgers glanced into the dugout and yelled, "Hey! Jackie does not do interviews," at which point Bob quickly shot back, "He does now!"

With that, Brooksie bolted from the dugout, hopped over the railing, ran up the steps and high-tailed it out of Wrigley Field, clutching his precious interview. He ran all the way to the car, tucked the recording device inside and casually returned to Wrigley for the game.

I'll never forget the smile and twinkle in his eye as Bob told me that story a few years ago.

One of the first things I did Wednesday after I got the job at KMRY was to call Bob's wife, Susie, and their son Rob, an accomplished broadcaster himself. Both of them congratulated me on the assignment, wished me well and said they were glad KMRY hired me. It helps to know the Brooks family is on my side and that Bob would have approved.

Incidentally, I was driving to the Xavier softball game in Vinton Thursday night and listening to the sports report on KMRY at 5:50 p.m. when all of a sudden I could have sworn I heard Bob's voice in the car. It's a good thing I had two hands on the steering wheel or I might have landed in one of those corn fields in Benton County.

As it turns out, it was Bob's voice inside my car. KMRY was playing a pre-recorded commercial for the Starlite Room and Bob was the narrator for one of the station's fine sponsors.

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It seemed like a voice from above, booming down from the Broadcasters Heavenly Hall of Fame.