

Dyrland is 'The Voice of J-Hawks'

Written by Tom Fruehling
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Although he's been the announcer at Jefferson High School sporting events for two decades, it wasn't until a couple of years ago that David Dyrland was first called by the title that suits him so well.

"I was at a Hawkeye basketball game and saw (former Jeff star) Jarrod Uthoff before the game," recalls Dyrland, 64, a retired Cedar Rapids electrician with 40 years in the trade. "I said, 'Remember me?' And he said, 'You're The Voice of the J-Hawks.' And that really pleased me."

He's much more than the anonymous guy that reads the starting lineup, though. Before nearly every Jeff home game – basketball, baseball and sometimes football – he also sings the National Anthem.

And while untrained as a singer but with a lifetime of experience, he sings it with such gusto that it's a crowd-pleaser every time.

"I've had other teams' coaches come up and ask me if I was going to sing that night," Dyrland says. "And there are refs who will say to me, 'Are you going to go for the high note tonight?' I'd say 90 percent of the time I hit the high note at the end, unless I have a cold."

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Long the bane of celebrity singers at big sports events, the Star Spangled Banner is known to be a tricky number because of its unusual low-to-high musical range. The lyrics, too, are often botched.

But Dyrland, who started out singing high soprano in an Episcopal Church boys choir before his voice changed, pulls it off with aplomb time after time.

“(Longtime Jefferson Coach) Larry Niemeyer said he used to watch the visiting team’s stands and there’d be kind of a buzz and people looking at each other like ‘What was that?’ when I’d hit the high note. It’s just a lot of fun.”

It all began, years ago, quite by accident.

Dyrland is himself a 1968 Jefferson graduate who was active in both choir and theater in addition to being co-captain of the track team. He not only was once a conference champion in the half-mile but was also presented an award by “The Music Man” Meredith Willson for best actor in a high school musical.

When sons Jonathan (now the vocal director at Marion High School) and Daniel (a music teacher at Prairie) followed after him at Jefferson, he and his wife Terri became active in the school booster club. In 1995, when Daniel was on the baseball team, Jefferson athletic director Jim Taylor recruited him to be the public address announcer at one of the games.

“I’d never done it before, but I said I’d give it a shot,” Dyrland says. “I had a performance background, and I thought it might be fun.”

He’s been announcing baseball ever since, took on football games at Kingston Stadium a couple of years later and added boys and girls

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basketball soon after. His first rendition of the Star Spangled Banner came about early in his career when two out-of-town teams played each other in a district baseball tournament on the Jefferson diamond.



"Before the game started," he explains, "the players from both teams lined up on the base paths expecting the National Anthem to be played. That's what they were used to.

"We didn't have a recording. We didn't even have a flag, as I remember."

Bob Tesar, the Jefferson principal at the time, turned to Dyrland. As a self-taught part-time licensed minister who served Bethany Congregational Church in the Time Check area for more than 20 years, Dyrland was no stranger to public speaking.

"But that was like an out-of-body experience," he says. "I'd sung it many times and knew the words. But never solo. I'm no Robert Goulet.

"I was shaking like a leaf and too scared to even listen to what I was singing. But I got through it.

"And (Jeff baseball coach) Joe Kenney came up to the booth and said to me, 'Hey Enrico Caruso, was that you who did that?' So after that, I started doing it at every game and got more comfortable.

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“Later on, kind of on the spur of the moment, I added some pizzazz by starting low and ending up on that really high note.”

As much as he enjoys his brief time in the spotlight and the cheers that always follow, Dyrland says he’s more than happy to pass on the duty to student singers or musicians. By now, though, he’s set the standard.

“I just think it’s important to sort of set the right tone before the games,” he explains. “I always try to make sure I pronounce the players’ names right, on both teams. And I always introduce the refs to show them respect and honor.”

And then when he hits that high note of the National Anthem, says The Voice of the J-Hawks, “I hope it makes it seem fun and special for everyone.”