

# INSIDE RADIO

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

## The Sporting Life

by Mike Kinosian, Air Personality Editor

“Murray In The Morning” listeners can expect to hear anything from big name celebrity interviews with the likes of Donald Trump; ongoing bits such as “Name That Tune” and “Family Feud”; and in-depth re-caps of a previous night’s reality-based television show — like Trump’s wildly popular “The Apprentice.”

While these are all solid morning-show elements, they’re not exactly earth shattering — especially for a show that’s heard on approximately 125 stations.

What does make this noteworthy, however, is “Murray In The Morning” airs on The Sporting News Radio Network.

It’s a show with little emphasis on sports and has been that way since debuting in August 2002.

### Something For Everybody

Judging from emails he receives, **Bruce Murray** estimates that his wakeup show has a 70%/30% male/female split. “The show is designed that, if a husband and wife are driving to work in the morning, both can listen,” he opines. “If people are talking diehard sports, [a woman will probably] want to listen to something else.”

But Murray breaks down whatever’s going on in the news and offers something for both sexes. “When you’re working morning hours, you have to be in a good mood,” he remarks. “If we’re laughing, hopefully, our listeners are also laughing. But if nothing else, we’re going to entertain ourselves. I know I’m going to have a good time when I go to work.”

### You Have To Be ... You

Approximately nine of every 10 “Murray In The Morning” guests are non-sports related.

Structuring the show this way is something that the 15-year sports talk host — who once did mornings at all-Sports WTEM-AM/Washington, DC — purposefully did.

Used primarily as producer of the overnight show, Murray

also did weekend updates in his first professional job at Infinity Sports WFAN-AM/New York. “WFAN realized [all-Sports] wasn’t the right formula for what guys want in the morning,” he notes. “Sometimes, it gets way too hardcore at 6:30am. I thought we should do a show about what guys are talking about. If it’s sports — fine; if it’s women — fine; if it’s television — fine. It will either succeed or fail, but it’s what I want to do. I hate to steal a page from Howard Stern — but you have to be yourself.”

### Sports To The Donald

Sporting News Radio was onboard with the idea, so along with network officials, Murray sat down and mapped out the show. “We decided that it would be good with a female, another guy and me,” he recalls. “When we first got started, we were feeling our way through and wanted to know how much sports to include.”

It took a few months for Murray to believe that whatever he and cast mates T.J. Shanoff and Tanyette Colon were feeling is what they should be discussing on the air. “If there’s not a lot of sports one day, we talk about Donald Trump and ‘The Apprentice.’”

The likeable billionaire with the wacky hairdo was on “Murray In The Morning” recently and turned in his usual stellar performance. “You get the idea that he definitely has an ego and is very sure of himself,” Murray comments. “He was very open and honest about doing [‘The Apprentice’]. He didn’t realize that it would be the kind of commitment that it turned out to be, but he likes doing it. People might hate him, but he comes across very well. He’s a tough guy who doesn’t beat around the bush. When he says, ‘you’re fired,’ you’re fired; I like that.”

### Big Name Guests

When a sports guest is featured, it’s usually a very big name. “Sitting down and talking for 15 minutes with [hockey’s] Wayne Gretzky is as good as it gets,” Murray states.

Several months ago, sexy Carmen Electra came into the studio. “The conversation with her is a little different, but sitting six feet away from one of the most beautiful women in the world isn’t bad, either. Maury Povich and Jerry Springer were on with us and I loved them. I like anyone who comes to us with a personality.”

### The Most Unforgettable Big Brother

Listener calls aren't generally taken, but Murray gets a lot of email feedback. "We get great response from the oddest people," Murray says delicately. "We had on Dr. Will Kirby from 'Big Brother.' He's a complete character and spent 20 minutes [explaining] what exercises men can do to enlarge our members. Trust me — we got a ton of emails on that guy. We obviously get a lot of feedback when we have beautiful women in the studio, but the same happens when we have guys who give interesting conversation."

One recent example was Atlanta Braves closer John Smoltz. As Murray asserts, "He's as classy a guy as I've come across in this business. He's open and honest and says things that aren't in the cookie cutter mold. When you ask him if he likes [his role as a closer], he'll flat-out tell you 'no.' He says the Braves like him as a closer, but he feels like he's being wasted. I don't know if he knows what they're going to do with him when spring training rolls around."

### **Production Background**

Tulane University was the site of Murray's first on-air radio job. "I got involved with the [campus] radio station there and fell in love with it," he recounts. "Anyone who gets behind the microphone catches the bug. I knew I wanted to be in radio when I left college, but wasn't sure if I wanted to be on the air or in production."

Thankful that he spent time producing, Murray has a better understanding for what his producer does and some of the difficulties he faces. "You take for granted how hard some of those guys work. I guess one of the great thrills about being on the air is the return you get. If you think you have something to say, it's not a bad medium to be in, which is why I enjoy it."

In addition to being a radio producer, Murray previously was a line producer at the now defunct Mizlou Sports News Network. "It was the first 24-hour [television] sports news network," he notes. "Sports News Network was phenomenal because it was almost like a college situation. People came from all over the country and none of us had housing. They rented a place for us and we worked around the clock. There were a couple of guys who came out of there who went on to do some great things. We only lasted nine months, but had a great group of people. Many of us still keep in touch; it was a nice, tight-knit group."

### **Team Player**

After Mizlou folded, Murray landed a job at Bristol, CT-based ESPN Radio. "That was fine, but for a single guy who was 29 years old, Bristol wasn't exactly the [home for] single women. If an opportunity came along, I was going to take it."

One of Murray's co-workers at WFAN became WTEM's Assistant PD and thought Murray would be perfect for an overnight on-air job there. "I lived in Washington before and loved the city, so I jumped at that opportunity. I did overnights for about four months and was asked to do mornings. That was a learning experience, to say the least."

### **Learning Experience**

Admitting he wasn't ready for that job, Murray says, "Everyone was relatively new in their positions and thought they knew what was right. On a Monday morning, we'd come in and say that the Redskins were terrible on Sunday. But [management] told us that we had to pretend that we hurt when the team lost. I followed the rules, but it wasn't me. Many times, it felt phony and forced. In addition, I was young and single and the hours were difficult. I'm married now and don't mind going to bed early."

With two young kids in the house, Murray doesn't usually enjoy the luxury of taking a nap during the day. "I try to go to bed by 9-9:30pm; TiVo has been a big part of my life."

His day generally starts an hour before he goes on the air; the show is on from 5-9am. "We're usually in the office until 1pm, doing research about future guests," he explains. "Preparation for me is watching television at night."

But he doesn't force himself to watch anything. "If I'm interested in something, that's what we're going to talk about. If it fails, it's because people aren't interested in what I'm interested in."

### **Get To Know Us**

While Murray knew the starting lineups for this year's Super Bowl participants — the Patriots and Panthers — he readily admits that he can't recite squads for obscure college teams. "I watch what I know is necessary," he points out. "I definitely don't feel the need to sit down and [look at] a San Antonio Spurs-Indiana Pacers game. We don't take a lot of phone calls, so no one is going to call and ask if I watched the game. But if I did happen to watch it, I'll talk about it. I'm still a sports fan and I'll read about it, but I don't feel compelled to watch Sunday Night Hockey on ESPN."

Clearly not a stats-obsessed sports geek, Murray jokes, "That's the guy just out of college who's sitting on the couch, eating a bag of potato chips. People have to get to know us. Our show is more about us than content. Much of what we talk about is ourselves. It's a little idiosyncrasy, but I don't like using public restrooms. We're not scared to let people know our personal traits, likes and dislikes. If people like us, they're going to like the show. We talk about personal life experiences."

### **Avoiding The Call-In Trap**

Those discussions will work, Murray maintains, if they're natural. "You just can't do things like come in on a Wednesday morning in March and have to find a way to discuss the Seattle-Philadelphia NBA game. I didn't want to get caught in the call-in radio trap where you're driven by issues that need to be attacked, so people can pick up the phone and dial you. I want to be able to have fun. With a number of other people on the show, we can have conversations, without worrying if we're generating enough phone calls. It may not be a subject that people [will call

about], but it's still entertaining to them. Morning radio is a completely different animal."

There are frequent on-air arguments; Tanyette gladly offers the female perspective.

#### **Meeks Shuns Mild**

In the case of NBC-TV reality series "Average Joe: Hawaii," for example, Murray maintains a great looking woman will never go out with an average looking guy.

That theory was supported this past Monday when former Miss USA-Missouri Larissa Meeks did, indeed, select hunky Brian over underdog favorite, Beantown's Brian Worth. "That's exactly what happens in real life," asserts Murray. "[Tanya] gets passionate about football, but we talk about so many other things. I can say that Donald Trump is a cool guy, but she'll tell me if women are really attracted to him."

#### **Rob, Rudy, Richard Hatch & The Rest**

"Survivor" castoffs generally appear on "Murray In The Morning" each week. What's seen on the Thursday night CBS-TV show, they claim, is very creative editing. "I love watching the show and they're all great guests," reports Murray. "It may not be reality television, but I still love it because it's real people. The network may present it the way they want us to see it, but you don't know what's going to happen in the end. As far as I'm concerned, it's great to sit down and try to figure it out."

#### **Local Versus National**

Doing a Sports show on a national network gives Murray the freedom to cover whoever and whatever's hot. Local hosts are usually forced to talk about their local teams and, as Murray candidly states, "If they're bad, you're stuck talking about really bad teams. At some point, people lose interest."

The time Murray spent in the nation's capital consisted of lean years for the city's sports franchises. "The [NBA's] Bullets, [NHL's] Capitols and [NFL's] Redskins weren't very good and they don't have a baseball team. Since we were stuck doing all-Sports, it was, at times, very difficult. At the same time, there's a measure of return that comes from being involved in a community. You get responses from people around the country on a national show, but you're not associated with any one place. I can't put my finger on which one is better."

Reflective of business today, several Sporting News Radio air talents do their shows away from the network's suburban Chicago studios. "It's a little different," Murray says. "But there's a great group of guys like James Brown, who works out of Washington, DC and Tim Brando, who is based in Louisiana. Our paths don't cross very much. There's great camaraderie among the producers, because they work long days. But it's a very different dynamic."

#### **Sports Saturation**

ESPN, FOX and Sporting News are among the major radio sports networks and Murray doesn't envision an expansion of that number. "Several years ago, there was Sports Fan Radio," he notes. "But that went by the wayside; there's also been some consolidation of other sports networks. I think one day we might scale back to two [major radio sports networks]."

Sports radio saturation on the local level, of course, exists on a market-by-market basis. "There are two all-Sports stations here in Chicago competing against each other [Infinity's WSCR-AM and ABC's WMVP-AM]. I don't think there's much more room for another. [On the other hand], there are probably some other cities that do need a bigger voice in sports. WFAN is such a dominant voice that it's hard for even a station like [ESPN's WEPN] to compete against them. There's definitely enough in the big cities; I can't comment about the smaller markets."

#### **All-Sports To "Guy Talk" Evolution**

When "Murray In The Morning" first launched, emails basically came from people who were critical of the de-emphasized sports content. "People were saying that we'd be off the air in six months," Murray notes. "You can't have a thin skin and I prepared everyone for those kind of comments. [Sporting News Radio and predecessor One-On-One Sports] did nothing but sports for about 10 years and this was going to be a complete transition. We tried to make it slow."

The less than flattering emails are now down to about one a month. "We talked about football when we first came on [in August 2002], because – even now - [that sport] drives a lot of what we do," Murray explains. "Not long thereafter, we started to make the transition and became a guy-talk show. That's when we did more guy-talk than sports."

#### **Excellent Direction**

Having had success taking the show on the road, Murray says, "We just went to the Bahamas for the Michael Jordan Celebrity Invitational. It was a nice mix of what we do – many sports people and many entertainment people. Our show really excels when we can sit down and have live guests. More and more - that's the direction [in which] we're headed."



WHO: Bruce Murray  
WHAT: "Murray In The Morning"  
WHERE: The Sporting News Radio Network  
WHEN: Monday – Friday, 6 - 9am  
HOW MANY AFFILIATES: Approximately 125