

# INSIDE RADIO

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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## MEET ANOTHER OUTRAGEOUS BRUNO

by Mike Kinoshian, Special Features Editor

**S**chisms develop among Sports radio partisans when they isolate their selection process for a personality of choice.

Some embrace those heartily executing the “Guy Talk” philosophy while others are partial to talents spewing a litany of stats.

If the need warrants for an on-air talent who can deftly unfurl a series of comedic one-liners; provide cogent background on the day’s top stories; and tie everything together with the most infectious laugh and one of the industry’s most ingratiating personalities, the name ***Tony Bruno*** should immediately leap to mind.

As of two weeks ago (8-10) Premiere’s Fox Sports Radio is syndicating Bruno’s “Into the Night” which again originates from Clear Channel/Los Angeles Sports flagship KLAC. “Dan [Patrick] and I are the [Content Factory’s] two standalone shows,” he remarks. “Dan does mornings and I do the night shift. My show was syndicated by Westwood One [but Content Factory CEO/Managing Partner] Jimmy [de Castro] was trying to get me on Premiere which is obviously the world’s number one syndicator. I know the Premiere people were receptive and it finally came together.”

### Getting His Fill

Radio grabbed this Philadelphia native’s attention in the late-1960s when he was just entering his teens. “The interesting thing is I had no reason to consider it,” Bruno comments. “My dad died when I was ten and no one in my family had done any broadcasting work. I sat up at night listening to radio. I was fascinated because it was what kept me company. I knew it was what I wanted to pursue and I did.”

Air personalities he called were courteous and imparted friendly advice about how to get into the business. “I befriended several of them back in the great WFIL days,” Bruno explains. “I got a job when I was 18 and have been [in the business] ever since.”

Especially in that era, any youngster interested in the medium coveted an on-air position however Bruno remarks, “Big-time personalities moved from station to station and I knew that progression would take forever for me. I like sports but didn’t say that one day I was going to be a sports talk host. There were no such things back then.”

Delivering overnight updates was his vehicle into the medium. “I just wanted to be on the air,” recounts Bruno whose first seven

years in the business were spent as a newsman. “I was thrilled to be working at the station I listened to [WFIL] and didn’t have any problems [about being on in that day-part]. It was a great experience and I got to learn with some very talented people. I just wanted to absorb as much as I could.”

One Philadelphia co-worker became WSGN/Birmingham’s Program Director in 1976 and wanted Bruno to be part of the station’s wakeup show. “That was my first taste of morning drive radio,” he points out. “I got to cover Alabama football and UAB basketball. The sports thing really began to take off. I stayed in Birmingham for two years - my first son was born there. My wife hated it though and we moved back to Philly.”

Hired by WFIL to do mornings upon his City of Brotherly Love homecoming Bruno was also the station’s Sports Director and covered sports fulltime in 1978. “I got entrenched when Philly [sports teams] were getting very good,” he recounts. “I saw Sports as a niche format that was going to grow. It’s something people enjoy and want.”

### Networking’s Upsides

Networks took notice of the personable Bruno who, in 1980, landed an RKO Radio weekend update opportunity.

Current Los Angeles Dodgers broadcaster Charlie Steiner was responsible for bringing him to RKO. “I took the train from Philly and would do three-minute [reports] every hour,” Bruno recounts.

Formidable update talent was in evidence there as Bruno handled RKO-2 duties and promising newcomer Keith Olbermann did RKO-1 updates. “It was just an incredibly-talented group of people which also included [ex-Oakland raiders coach] John Madden and [veteran sportscaster] Don Criqui,” boasts Bruno who worked there for five years. “Dick Clark bought the network and pretty much eliminated all its information parts. It became a music provider. I came back and worked locally in Philly again.”

Twelve years after receiving his first contact about a national sports job Bruno fielded another invitation which came from a familiar source. “ESPN was beginning a radio network and Charlie Steiner asked if I’d be interested in working there [on weekends]. I was doing sports at a music station. I had young kids and didn’t want to work seven days a week.”

So the decision to decline was unproblematic until he received another call two weeks later in which he was aggressively pitched about the merits of taking the assignment. "I commuted to [ESPN's Bristol, CT studios] from 1992-1999 and helped launch the radio network," he states. "It was a great place and a [terrific] experience. My national recognition really came from ESPN Radio. I moved to Los Angeles in 2000 when the Fox Sports Radio Network [debuted]."

### Bay Area Connection

Not everything was fun and games in that particular Fox Sports Radio stint as Bruno was unfortunately (in light of the situation) able to summon up his news expertise on the morning of Tuesday September 11, 2001. "We were in Sherman Oaks at the Premiere Radio studios," he remembers with clarity. "All of a sudden, we thought a private plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. We had that sick feeling in our stomach and wondered if it was what we thought it was."

That's when Bruno swiftly pulled the sports plug and put on his news cap. "My responsibility wasn't to run away from the story but to report what was happening," he stresses. "I wanted to be part of the biggest story in this country's history. I thought we did an unbelievable job. We stayed on the air until 3pm [rather than the customary 9am] because we just didn't want to leave."

Once Bruno's Fox Sports Radio contract expired (in 2004), San Francisco's KNBR made him an enticing offer. "The station has always been great to me," he explains. "I told the KNBR folks I wanted to stay in Los Angeles [but] if there weren't any national opportunities I would gladly move to San Francisco."

Already stockpiling national credentials (RKO, ESPN Radio and Fox Sports Radio), Bruno was approached by Sporting News Radio whose representative said the rebuilding network was serious about competing against ESPN Radio and Fox. "I was asked to be its morning guy," Bruno explains. "All I wanted was someone willing to work and win. I didn't want to go where the windows were being painted and the place was being cleaned just so it could be sold. I trusted the people there and had a great time."

Ultra convenient was the fact that Sporting News Radio's studios were in Santa Monica - two miles from Bruno's house - and he was

given a three-year contract. "People said the network wasn't going to be around but I felt we could compete and win. The company [however] was sold during the time I was there."

Given assurances there would be no cutbacks Bruno nevertheless was later informed his contract wouldn't be renewed. "If you don't want me around, I won't be around," he categorically states. "Luckily Jimmy [de Castro] called me last summer to fill in for Dan Patrick. When you disappear from the national landscape people wonder what happened to you."

### A-Team's Family Fun

Interest developed in having Bruno host a nighttime program although mornings would be his preferred day-part. "You have to do what's out there," he acknowledges. "Things are tough in radio, especially with so much consolidation and cutbacks [but] if you're talented and are respected in the business there will always be an opportunity. Here we are a year later exploding the show on [nearly 250] stations. Things are good and I always stay positive."

Dedicated to doing the finest show he can Bruno steadfastly stays true to who he is, never attempting to change. "I always have fun on the air," he declares. "That's what I told Jimmy de Castro as well as the Premiere people. When I stop having fun, I won't do it anymore. I'm not doing [the job] for a paycheck. I do it because I love radio and it's in my blood."

Preparation is never ending for Bruno who is typically up at 9:30am and participates with Gary Radnich in a 30-minute KNBR weekday segment at 10am. "I've been doing it for 15 years," he points out. "It's free-form radio and people love it. We talk about entertainment, movies and ridiculous stuff. We don't plan it but it is compelling radio and it keeps me sharp."

Nuts-and-bolts sports stories are followed as they develop through the day and Bruno arrives at the studio 90 minutes before he hits the air.

Energy level and entertainment components (with liberal doses of rim-shots) contribute to giving "Into The Night" a decidedly morning drive flavor. "Most stations don't put on 'A-List' talent [between 7-10pm]," Bruno remarks. "We give stations programming they couldn't possibly get anywhere else. That's the

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way we're presenting it and it's a strong selling point. We'll always be wherever there's a big event. I've been very lucky to meet many top sports and entertainment people. It's easy for me to get these people on to have a fun conversation."

Involving others in the program (including producer Tim Cates who ironically was the sidekick of Joe McDonnell, whose KLAC "Joe McDonnell Experience" was replaced by Bruno last September) provides a distinctive spark to Bruno's playful personality. "It sounds good to hear multiple voices, provided people aren't stepping on each other," he emphasizes. "I want people to know we are a family and have a bunch of fun. This is a great business [but] if people aren't happy to be in it, they should [leave]. You get better at this by being around people who are good. Many people want to be in this business but don't know what it takes to succeed in it."

### Mayoral Razzing

Witty and clever catch-phrases and drop-ins punctuate Bruno's program with "It's an outrage" being one of the most familiar. "Frank Rizzo was doing afternoons at the old WCAU in Philadelphia," Bruno recalls of Philadelphia's former two-term Mayor. "Everything was an outrage to him and this is my tribute to him. I'm not outraged at everything so I don't say it all the time [although] I put others who say it in my sound effects bank. We have President Obama saying it and [I use it as a drop-in]."

Certain elements Bruno has learned are executed in his highly entertaining fashion. "Jim Rome is an amazingly talented legend in this business but I don't take things from his show and incorporate them into mine," he maintains. "The bottom line is to do your own thing and be yourself."

Whenever the book is written about how to do Sports talk radio, Bruno insists he'll be the first to read it. "I don't have any secrets or 'inside radio' knowledge - I be myself and do what I do. Nothing makes me feel better to hear someone say they enjoy listening to my show. The ultimate payoff is to be able to make someone feel good after a miserable day at work. You have to stay current in an era when older folks are getting pushed out of the business."

Gloom and doom can pervade our industry however Bruno correctly observes, "The last time I checked - every car still has a radio in it. Even though the car business is tough, car radios aren't being taken out to cut back expenses. I know people can get their information and entertainment from iPods, CDs and the internet but people are still listening to radio when they're in their vehicles. Radio isn't going anywhere."

### Best Damn Move ... Period

Long suffering Phillies fans got to revel in a World Series win last year and Bruno was in Las Vegas with his son Chris the night the team clinched the title. "I wanted to celebrate it with someone I love so I jumped a plane and he and I watched the game at the Venetian."

My kids were young when the Phillies [last] won the pennant in 1993. They got to experience that because I was covering local sports in Philly. Seeing the Phillies win a World Series with my son was something that was really, really cool."

Perhaps the best four years Bruno's had in Los Angeles were the first four when he was part of the team that launched Fox Sports Radio. "I got to do [television's] 'The Best Damn Sports Show' with the gang over there and had a lot of fun," he declares. "None of that would have happened if I didn't move to Los Angeles. It kick-started my career and was the best move I ever made. The people at Premiere are really resuscitating my career one more time. Fortunately I'm back on the air and working with a great company that is marketing this show."

One thing Bruno desperately hopes to avoid becoming though is "a crotchety old guy" on the air. "There are many other people in sports and media who pass away shortly after they leave what they do," he observes. "I don't want to work until I die. I want to [keep at it] as long as I can generate ratings and revenue. I'm handy and like to fix up the house. I also like to travel so there will never be a shortage of things to do. If I'm old, bitter and broke on the radio, I'll leave and go to whatever life I have left. If I retire tomorrow, I'll have something to do with my life."



**WHO: Tony Bruno**

**WHAT: "Into The Night"**

**WHERE: Premiere's Fox Sports Radio  
(produced by The Content Factory)**

**WHEN: Monday-Friday, 7-10pm**

**HOW LONG: Since August 10, 2009**