

INSIDE RADIO®

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“Personalities INSIDE RADIO”

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ORIGINAL STILL FABULOUS

by Mike Kinoshian, Personality Editor

If you're so inclined – but especially in the middle of the night – the original Tommy's is the place to go in Los Angeles for a sloppy, artery-clogging chili cheeseburger.

That is unless you want a similar gastronomic temptation accompanied by arguably the city's best steak fries at the original Tommie's.

Don't however confuse either of those hamburger stands with the original Tomy's or original Tammy's, one of which was earlier known as the original Tamy's.

Residents of various other cities will encounter the original Joe's Pizza only to find the true original Joe's a few blocks away – if not directly across the street.

Bottom line: People have been known to exercise great poetic liberty and license when utilizing “original,” but [Nanci Donnellan](#) can truly lay claim to that descriptor.

More recognizable in industry circles as “The Fabulous Sports Babe” or simply “The Babe,” Donnellan's unique shtick propelled her into much more than a cult classic.

Right Place – Right Time

Signed by ESPN in 1994 she became the first of her gender to do a nationally syndicated Sports Talk show.

Sure to win considerable favor is Genesis Communications' decision to bring “The Babe” back to radio for 3-6pm duty on WHBO/Tampa. “I've talked with people [at Genesis] off and on and done fill-in there and at other stations the last year or so,” remarks T.F.S.B. whose first official day on WHBO was two months ago (4-11-2008). “I got the feeling in the fall I [wanted to do radio] again. I haven't worked five days a week in five years [but this] was the right place at the right time and it is home.”

Opting to try a dissimilar approach instead of merely repeating previous program incarnations, “The Babe” for the first time in her career is working with a partner, former NFL linebacker Scot Brantley. “It is a new station and we're getting people to know we [exist],” she points out. “Scot and I will do whatever we have to.”

As part of a self-imposed media spotlight hiatus, Donnellan didn't pick up a newspaper for six months; watch television for a year; or listen to radio for over two years. “A lot of white noise went away and it was very quiet,” she reflects. “I wanted to experience other things and do some traveling. I felt I deserved it and owed myself that. I thought I'd saved up enough nickels to take some time off.”

For the first time since her childhood, she spent a summer on Cape Cod and as Donnellan proclaims, “It was one of my favorite things [because The Cape] owns my heart completely. I didn't know [exactly] how long it would be and always said if I [weren't] having fun, I wouldn't be back. When you're in front of that microphone, it's like dancing. There's something inside of you and, at least for me, I feel it. I don't know if it comes from being in music radio at one point. I hadn't had the feeling for a long time until I began doing fill-in work.”

Fiery Seattle Move

With one ear steadfastly glued to a tiny transistor radio when she was supposed to be asleep, Donnellan recounts her most vivid early radio memory dealt with a program describing Christmas celebrations around the world. “I was probably eight years old when I heard it. Radio was my friend and a good companion.”

Raised in an Air Force family, Donnellan moved frequently but considers Boston her home.

While there in 1980 she worked at WEEI-AM when the now Entercom Sports powerhouse was a CBS-owned all-News operation. “All the guys around me wanted to do play-by-play [but] that never interested me,” states “The Babe” whose first actual radio job was as a WRKO/Boston news writer. “I always wanted to do a talk show. I did music radio when I lived on Cape Cod [and Greater Media/Boston VP/Market Manager] Phil Redo was my PD. He believed in the things I wanted to do and gave me [considerable] insight about this business. I've known him for 30 years and consider him a mentor. I also have [many positive] feelings for [WINS/New York Executive Editor/PD] Mark Mason. He's always been a supporter and has given me a lot of good advice.”

Going to Florida in the early-1980s was not only essential to

Donnellan it would be where she'd stay for ten years before relocating to KJR-AM/Seattle. "I've always been the 'first to ...' and the opportunity in Seattle gave me a chance to do something in a market I didn't know anything about. I was comfortable in Boston and in Florida [but] put myself into the fire [in Seattle]. That was a big step because I knew what I did [on-air] played on the East coast. Going to the West coast was a whole different thing. People on the East coast live and die by what the Red Sox and Yankees do. Everyone on the West coast doesn't jump for a ticket [but] I was there [when] things were turning for [baseball's] Mariners and [basketball's] Supersonics."

Catch Of The Day

The "Sports Babe" persona is nothing more than Donnellan being herself. "It's the passion I bring and what I feel inside," she insists. "Some [listeners] think I'm just holding down the fort until [the man] shows up. [Listeners] assume they can do it [as well if not better than you can] because they have opinions. You want to sound like you're at a bar, shooting the breeze about sports [but you actually] have to do station formatics. Athletes saw me in a different light and I never had many problems with them."

Admitted football "freak" Donnellan maintains that game, rather than baseball, is America's pastime but emphasizes she wouldn't be doing this particular job unless she liked all sports. "I'll talk about anything," she confirms. "I've had an allegiance to the [Tampa Bay] Buccaneers for the [entire life of that NFL franchise]. I also grew up as a Red Sox fan and lived in New York when the Yankees were winning all those championships in the 1990s. It was a pretty dramatic, fun thing to be there during that time."

No longer communicating with a national audience as she did for so long on ESPN and later on the Sports Fan Radio Network, hometown community is Donnellan's laser focus these days. "I've always said my whole life is show prep and it is," she maintains. "We're all looking at websites. There are a million national shows and the [local element] has suffered. When something happens nationally, it is a way for me to turn around and ask [about area implication]. When [Packers QB]

Bret Favre retired, people wanted to talk about how great he was but you can only do so much of that. My hook was talking [to Tampa Bay Buccaneer players] about what it was like to defend against him."

Rumblings abound concerning a possible exodus of Seattle's Supersonics so former "Emerald City" inhabitant Donnellan polled those in Orlando about what they'd do if the NBA's Magic were to suddenly pick up and move elsewhere. "Can fans stop it or is something like this just a way of the world,?" she ponders. "Local, local, local is what I'm set on here. I really believe I'm the last person on earth who believes in radio's public service aspect."

Much of the transaction and business component of sports goes on in the day, enabling "Brantley & The Babe" to talk about it in afternoon drive. "I've always felt [this daypart] was better for me and we get to disseminate news and traffic," she explains. "All of that is important. I've gotten no further than the local show and haven't even thought about [taking this program national]. Once I got to [ESPN headquarters in] Bristol [CT], someone told me it would be hard doing a local show once you've done a national [one but] I didn't find that to be the case in places I filled in last year."

Although harboring viewpoints on a variety of non-sports related issues, Donnellan is unsure she'd like to spend each day railing about taxes and politics. "[Those] who do general Talk radio probably can't even imagine talking about football and baseball on-air every day," she opines. I assume it's [a particular person's] cup of tea. My new favorite show is the Discovery Channel's 'Deadliest Catch.' It has absolutely nothing to do with sports. Some of my listeners feel [the same way] and we talk about it."

Shocked Rat

It's been approximately 27 years since Donnellan's last music radio stop - WBOS/Boston in 1981 - and she jokes, "I don't see myself 'spinning the platters that matter' anymore. I'm not really sure how they even do it. I always wanted to do sports. We can encompass many different [issues]. You can't ignore

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certain things happening in your town. There is an ongoing issue in Detroit with [Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's alleged affair with his chief of staff]. If I were working at a Sports station there, I'd say something about it. I can't act like it wasn't happening. It's what people are talking about."

Now that Donnellan is back doing a daily airshift she's stepped up her own radio routine which includes listening to Sirius in the car. "That's been interesting because it's totally different [from] the kind of [terrestrial] radio I'm used to," she observes. "I'm not a prude and have been around the block but some of it shocks me. I'll listen to Howard [Stern] sometimes when I'm coming in but I sometimes feel I've been out-of-the-loop. I'm surprised at how malicious some radio has become on many levels. Perhaps I was a Pollyanna but I honestly thought things would chill after [9-11-2001]. I thought radio would be a little kinder and gentler but I was completely wrong. We've become more divisive. Things have gotten so ugly at times. I wonder how things can be said about people just because they're in politics."

Conversely though "The Fabulous Sports Babe" completely understands a certain other nature of the industry and declares, "I'm a radio rat. My bags are semi-packed all the time and I'll go where the job is. Most of the time when you aren't working, it has nothing to do with you."

While she hasn't had to study an Arbitron book for quite some time, she realizes it is an integral part of the business. "In the same respect, my job is to do the best I can with the show," she emphasizes. "Ratings aren't necessarily about a show. It is about marketing, advertising and how a company/organization is going to put you out there."

Painful Past Procedure

Others can borrow all that want but in the end, as Donnellan states, "There's only one Babe."

At one point, that meant good-naturedly jabbing those calling from their cars - "rich guy on a cell phone" - but she's eased up thinking it's a dated reference. "Everyone has one now [but listeners are] saying [the line] themselves."

Released from the hospital in February following bilateral knee replacement, Donnellan is progressing well and explains, "I fought it for many years and said it couldn't happen to me. I actually had to look at myself in the mirror and say I had to grow up. This isn't going to get better. It got to the point I was wheeling around my house in a desk chair."

Standing up had become a five-minute project for her. "Believe me, double-knee replacement is the most painful thing in the world [but] it's behind me," the former host of a daily ESPN2 show remarks. "The pain I have now isn't the same as I had prior to the surgery."

Ultimate Survivor

As agonizing a chapter as that is in her life, it pales in comparison to when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

This October however will mark her tenth anniversary of being cancer-free. "I don't think about it," Donnellan states. "For the first five years, I took the cancer drug and [it did cross my mind] every day because I was taking that pill. I go once a year for regular checkups. My outcome was a lot better than [that of many others]. People get this kind of diagnosis all the time and become absolutely paralyzed. The first day I remember banging my head against the wall [asking] 'Why me?'"

Already a successful Harper-Collins author for "Babe In Boyland," Donnellan spends a bit more time writing although she's not necessarily convinced a book regarding her bout with cancer is imminent. "I assume people are tired of hearing stories [on that subject]," she muses. "I'm usually a wordy person [but] wonder how people can blog three times a day. I can't figure that one out."

Anyone familiar with "The Babe" who hasn't seen her recently will most assuredly do a double-take since she's dropped 100 pounds in the past 30 months. "I started a small clothing company where I design plus-size exercise, yoga and workout clothes," she reports. "I always found it difficult to get quality clothes in my size so I just created it. Who would have known? Not me until I did it. Cancer changed my life and my life perspective changed drastically. In the grand scheme of [things], it really isn't all that important [that I know] the backup third baseman for every team. I'm a survivor in this business and in life. I truly take things one day at a time."



WHO: Nanci "The Fabulous Sports Babe" Donnellan

WHAT: Co-Host (with Scot Brantley) - "Brantley & The Babe"

WHERE: Genesis Communications Sports WHBO-AM/Tampa

WHEN: Monday - Friday, 3-6pm

HOW LONG: Since April 11, 2008

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