

By Tom Schuman

# Political Power Player

## Russert to Deliver Post-Election Analysis

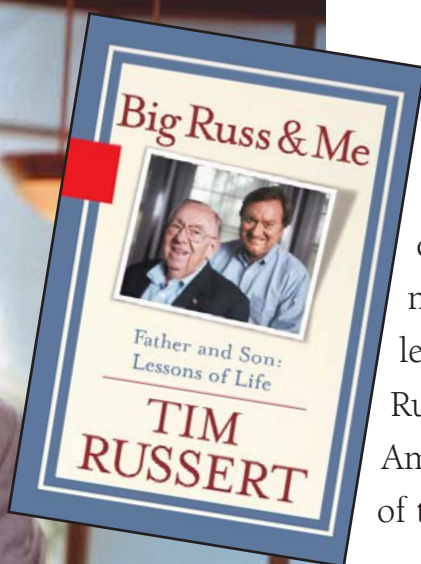
The image that most people have of Tim Russert is one of an icy stare as he relentlessly questions the guest in the hot seat on NBC's *Meet the Press*.

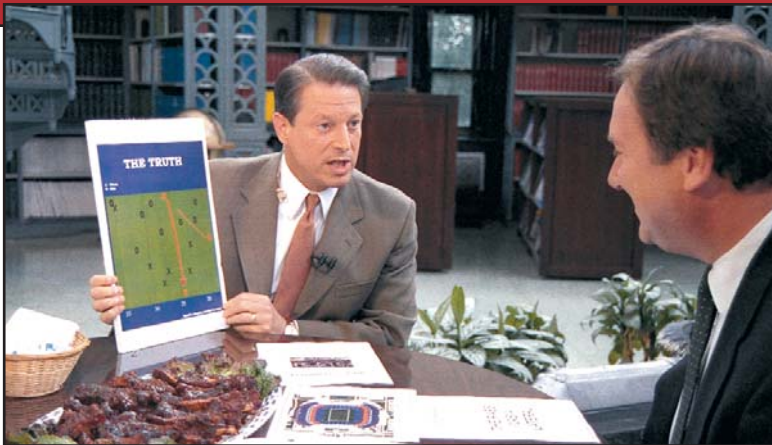
But moderator of the top-rated Sunday public affairs program is only one of Russert's duties. The 54-year-old Buffalo, New York native is also:

- Managing editor of the program
- Senior vice president and Washington bureau chief of NBC News
- Political analyst for *NBC Nightly News* and the *Today* program
- Anchor of *The Tim Russert Show*, a weekly interview offering on CNBC
- A contributing anchor for MSNBC

In other words, if it's news and Washington is involved – isn't it always – then Russert will be there to deliver an immediate description of the impact and/or an in-depth probe for additional information and insights.

Although always active and quite visible, Russert will be on center stage in the next few months. As the presidential campaign leads to the November election, Russert will be one of the key people Americans will count on for analysis of the race for the White House.





Al Gore utilizes a graphic to make his point on Meet the Press.



Russert (second from right) worked New York Gov. Mario Cuomo (right).

(His post-election review and look ahead to the next four years will be featured as Russert delivers the keynote address at the Indiana Chamber's 15th Annual Awards Dinner on November 10. See Page 39 for additional information or visit [www.indianachamber.com](http://www.indianachamber.com)).

With the George Bush-Al Gore election night drama just beginning to unfold four years ago, Russert took a marker and scribbled "Florida, Florida, Florida" on a white board. It was a prophecy about the importance of the state to the eventual outcome and, of course, a precursor to the 36-day drama that unfolded.

A graduate of John Carroll University and the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, Russert was a special counsel in the United States Senate from 1977-82 and a counselor in the New York governor's office in 1983-84.

He worked closely with New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan and later with Gov. Mario Cuomo. That experience, he notes, is a major benefit to understanding the issues and the intricacies of government operations. Cuomo's keynote address at the 1984 Democratic convention focused on themes including hard-working fathers and the importance of strong family units.

### TV tradition

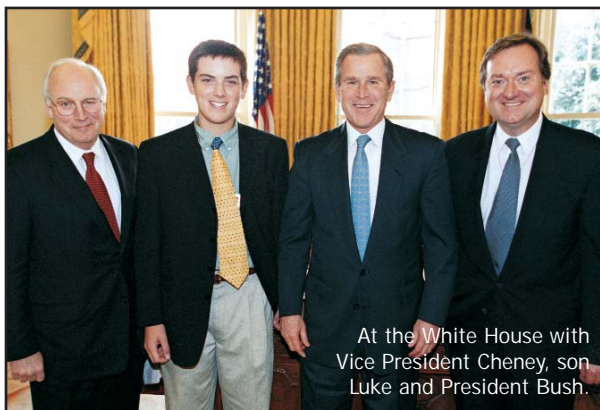
In its 57th year, *Meet the Press* is, by far, the longest running program on network television. There have only been nine moderators over that 57-year span. Russert, in his 13th year at the microphone, is the dean of those moderators. The show generates an average audience of five million viewers each week.

Every president since John F. Kennedy has appeared on the show. Russert interviewed George W. Bush from the White House earlier this year. Among the world leaders that have been guests are Fidel Castro, Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, Mikhail Gorbachev, King Hussein of Jordan and Tony Blair.

Russert describes the mission of *Meet the Press* as "a thoughtful exchange of ideas, sometimes tense, even feisty, occasionally humorous, but always fair and always civilized."

### On the other side

Although Russert has enjoyed a 20-year career at NBC – supervising live broadcasts of the *Today* show from Rome with Pope John Paul II making an unprecedented appearance among the early highlights – he also has experience within government.



At the White House with Vice President Cheney, son Luke and President Bush.

### Big Russ

Russert has always relied on his own father for advice and guidance. He authored *Big Russ & Me*, released earlier this year, which quickly became a *New York Times* best seller. It was his preference, rather than the "Meet the Press behind the scenes" stories he had been asked to tell.

In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Russert

### Baseball, the Senator and the Kid

Tim Russert is well known as one of the most ardent Buffalo Bills football fans. But one of his favorite stories, told to the *Washington Post*, involves baseball. Russert was working for New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was asked about the race for Manhattan borough president while appearing on a local talk show.

*It was a difficult question for him to take on, and so he deftly avoided it. He said, "There's only one race in New York today, and that's the Yankees, and if the Yankees don't win it today, Torrez will win it Tuesday."*

Russert says the senator's knowledge of contemporary baseball was limited, at best. When asked how he knew about the current baseball situation, Moynihan responded, "Who's Torrez?"

*I said, "Senator, where did that come from?" He said: "Well, I was in the chair getting made up, and this young kid with a Yankees cap came in with a ball and glove. And he's throwing the ball in the glove, and I said, 'Hey, Tiger, are the Yankees going to win today?' He said, 'I don't know, mister, but if they don't win today, Torrez will do it Tuesday.'"*

*And Pat Moynihan went on live TV and simply repeated that, not having a clue what it meant. And he said, "If you can't trust a 10-year-old with a Yankee hat, who can you trust?"*

described his motivation.

"I think September 11 had a lot to do with (why I decided to write this book). I come from a family of civil service, policemen, firemen, sanitation workers ... I was surprised after September 11 how people said, 'See, we never knew that those policemen and firemen and first responders, as they now are called, were heroes.'

"And I always believed that my dad was the kind of person who was the backbone of the country. And I thought to affirm his life would be a very important thing for people of his generation, people of his background. And so, if we can have a national conversation about fathers and the role they play in their sons' lives and vice versa ... people look at Washington as this all-powerful center of political thought and media focus; (with this book), they have a sense that I came from a real family, from a real place called Buffalo.

"And that is essential to understanding why I ask what I ask and why I do what I do, and that this guy called Big Russ has been central to my life and that there are a lot of Big Russes in the country."

### Early mentors

Russert has been honored for his own family success by *Parents* magazine, the National Father's Day Committee and the National Fatherhood Initiative. He was a contributor to the 2002 book, *The Person Who Changed My Life: Prominent Americans Recall Their Mentors*. An excerpt of his story follows:


*In the seventh grade at St. Bonaventure School in Buffalo, New York, Sister Mary Lucille, a Sister of Mercy, was both impressed and yet concerned by – shall we say – my excessive energy in class. She expressed that in her words, "We have to channel that energy, Timothy," because I was prone to mischief. One day she told me, "I'm going to start a school newspaper and you're going to be the editor. This means that you have to give out assignments, you have to edit the copy, you have to write your own articles, you have to go around and interview students, teachers and administrative people, and publish the paper. You have to distribute it. You have to decide whether you're going to charge for it, or if you're going to have a fundraiser to underwrite the cost."*

*It became this extraordinary project that I threw myself into and so did all*


*my friends. It left us little time to get in trouble because we were so devoted to the paper, called The Bonette after St. Bonaventure School. Then she said, "If you don't keep up your grades we're not going to be able to do the second edition of the newspaper." That made us all committed to studying harder. It became a real class project.*

*On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated. We did a special edition of the paper and sent a copy to the new president, President Johnson; to Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy; and to*

*Continued on page 48*



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## Russert

*Continued from page 38*

Robert Kennedy, the attorney general. Some months later we received personal responses from all of them, which changed our lives. Here we were, only months ago with nothing and wondering whether or not school was worth our while – whether school could be fun, whether school was meaningful – and along came this young nun who created this entity called a school newspaper that we became deeply involved in.

We learned how to report, how to communicate, how to write; and then, on top of all that, people we watched on television, people who were so far removed from our ordinary lives, suddenly acknowledged not only our existence, but our work. From that day forward I was determined that I would have a career in journalism/public service...

We continued our newspaper in eighth grade. I was going on to high school and Sister Lucille suggested I go to Canisius High School, the Jesuit school in Buffalo. I said, "Sister, it's downtown, where all the rich kids go, sons of doctors and lawyers." My dad was a truck driver and left school in tenth grade to fight in World War II...Sister Lucille insisted that I take the entrance exam, which I did. I won a partial scholarship that helped with the tuition because we couldn't afford it...

The person who became most important to me at Canisius High School was Father John Sturm, the Prefect of Discipline. He was a former Golden Gloves boxer who entered the Jesuits, and he was tough. He would focus on the few kids who came from the south side of the city – there was only a handful of us from South Buffalo. Once when I got in trouble I said, "Father don't you have any mercy?" He grabbed me and replied, "Russert, mercy's for God. I deliver justice." I remember it like it was yesterday. Although I knew how to write, how to report, how to observe, I learned that unless one has discipline, all of it can be lost, and Father Sturm taught me discipline.

So now I have created the Sister Mary Lucille/Father Sturm Award, a cash prize that is provided to a Buffalo Catholic school teacher each year who has made a difference in a child's life by acting as a mentor...

I know that if I had not had the intervention and support of Sister Lucille and Father Sturm, I would not be the moderator of Meet the Press.

### INFORMATION LINK

**Resource:** Tim Russert and Meet the Press at [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032608/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032608/)

Indiana Chamber 15th Annual Awards Dinner at [www.indianachamber.com](http://www.indianachamber.com)