



Costas on Sports ... and More

Broadcaster to Speak at Annual Awards Dinner

Bob Costas has done it all – or just about all – in a 31-year broadcasting career that has focused on sports but also contained its fair share of interviews with news and entertainment personalities.

Asked what's missing from his résumé, Costas is mostly thankful for the many opportunities he has received. But, reflecting the diversity of his work, including the award-winning "Later with Bob Costas" on NBC from 1988 to 1994, he does offer some perspective.

"There are always people in this media-saturated culture that we're familiar with, but not overly familiar with. They've kept their silence," Costas analyzes. "Jack Nicholson you see in his movies, but he never does TV. I really respect Sandy Koufax for the way he guards his privacy. Johnny Carson was a person like that.

"JD Salinger and Harper Lee are two people I'd love to sit down with. They have not said a thing in 40 years," he continues. "People have read "The Catcher in the Rye" and "To Kill a Mockingbird," but they don't know who these authors are. I'd love to put the two of them together, but I'm not holding my breath waiting for it to happen."

On the sports front, Costas takes a more traditional approach. He's served as host or play-by-play announcer for all the major sports, including the last six Olympics on NBC, the Triple Crown horse racing series, various boxing specials and more. He has been named national Sportscaster of the Year a record eight times.

"There's no particular reason why I should be part of the Masters coverage. CBS and Jim Nantz do a great job," Costas comments. "But I would like to be part of it in a small way one time because it's such a classic event."



Free Spirits

Classic would not be the term to describe the professional team that gave Costas his first broadcasting job. As a 22-year-old who just graduated from Syracuse University, he became the play-by-play announcer for the St. Louis Spirits of the American Basketball Association. The franchise was known primarily for its blunders on and off the court in its two years of existence. As few as 400 fans were in attendance for some games in the 18,000-seat Checkerdome. The roster of colorful players included Marvin Barnes, who walked out on the team after a month of the season and was found days later playing in a pool tournament with his agent.

"I was starry-eyed, not just because it was a pro basketball job, but the games were carried on KMOX (a 50,000-watt station that reached most of the country)," Costas recalls. "I listened to KMOX growing up on Long Island and at Syracuse. Now I was working at the same place as (legendary Cardinals baseball announcer) Jack Buck.

“What I found in retrospect was that the Spirits were a crazy situation. I had nothing to compare it to at the time. Now, 30 years later, I haven’t seen anything like it since.”

For all the blunders, the two brothers who owned the Spirits made one of the best business moves of all time. When four ABA teams, including the Indiana Pacers, were absorbed into the NBA following the 1975-76 season, there were three franchises left out of the merger. Two accepted buyouts for folding their teams. The Spirits’ owners opted to take one-seventh of the TV money the former ABA teams would earn – forever.

While the NBA was not a major TV property in the mid-1970s, along came the likes of Larry Bird, Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan in the next decade. Popularity, and the value of TV contracts, soared. The Silna brothers have earned more than \$100 million from the deal.

Costas terms it possibly the greatest sports deal ever. “At the time, the take was modest. Now, they just walk to the mailbox and pick up their check every year.”



“CostasNow” on HBO allows the award-winning journalist to explore a variety of sports topics.

Diamond dilution

Baseball is Costas’ first love. Mickey Mantle was his boyhood baseball hero. Costas is proud that he was able to interview Mantle numerous times later in the former Yankee star’s life, allowing “The Mick” to “relax and express himself and have people see the best side of him.” Costas delivered a touching eulogy at Mantle’s funeral.

Baseball, he says, remains a great game. It is successful from a business standpoint, but it no longer possesses the element that made it special. The link between young people and the baseball stars of today doesn’t exist at the level it once did.

“From every objective measure – attendance, marketing, total TV viewership – baseball is thriving. What’s been lost is the element of romance, connection,” Costas offers. “Interest and excitement is one thing; fondness and that gentle enduring connection are another thing.”

During the baseball strike of 1994-95, Costas was outspoken in his criticism. The respect of others for his astute observations and remarks ignited stories that the broadcaster would be an ideal fit for commissioner of the game. Such suggestions have never completely gone away.

Costas puts a quick damper on such speculation – then and now.

“I was flattered that some people within the game mentioned my name,” he says. “I never encouraged it. I wasn’t interested and I wasn’t qualified. The analogy I like to use is that you might like your favorite political columnist’s commentary, but you don’t necessarily want them to be president. I was able to make my viewpoints and was happy to be part of the discussion.”

World stage

Costas has become symbolic with the Olympic Games. His first role as prime time host on NBC came in 1992 in Barcelona. He says that experience was significant in advancing his career. Other memorable moments rattle off his tongue as if they happened yesterday.

“That entire experience (Barcelona) still resonates, the way NBC covered the Games with an excellent combination of journalism and drama. Barcelona was rich in scenic history and beauty. The history of the Olympics transcends sports,” Costas states.

“In 1996, when (Muhammad) Ali lit the torch; that was a really stirring moment. Michael Johnson coming off the final turn (also in Atlanta in 1996) with all the flashlights popping on his home turf. The figure skating controversy in 2002. And being a Greek-American, seeing everything come off so well in Athens, I took a great deal of pride in that.”

Reggie! Reggie!

Just as he quickly recalls those Olympic memories, Costas offered a litany of Reggie Miller moments. (At the time of this interview, he was preparing to come to Indianapolis to interview the longtime Pacer star for his HBO television show “CostasNow”).

“There were all the clutch shots against the Knicks,” he begins, “and then the game winner,



Dwight Freeney chases Tom Brady out of the pocket in 2003. Costas thinks the Colts need home field advantage to catch the Patriots this season.

Game 4, Memorial Day 1998, coming off the screen against Michael Jordan and the Bulls. That was an incredibly clutch shot. You're not going to see a whole lot like that anymore (players spending their entire career with one team)."

Costas hosted the opening of Conseco Fieldhouse in November 1999 when Indiana honored its 50 greatest basketball players of all time. The night was memorable – "I can't imagine a similar ceremony opening the Alamodome," he deadpans – but says it's the facility that offers the ongoing tribute.

"It's the best arena in the NBA. They took the lead of Camden Yards (Baltimore) in baseball. It's a modern facility with its fan content, amenities and revenue-generating capabilities, but it pays tribute to the history of the game. It has a connection to generations of history. It's important that it's called a fieldhouse. It's a perfect fit for the city, the state and the team."

Focus on football

When Costas is speaking at the Indiana Chamber's Annual Awards Dinner on November 10 at the Indiana Convention Center,

he will be a long field goal away from the current home of the Colts. With the season two months old, will Indianapolis be looking forward to the playoffs or still trying to figure out how to beat the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots?

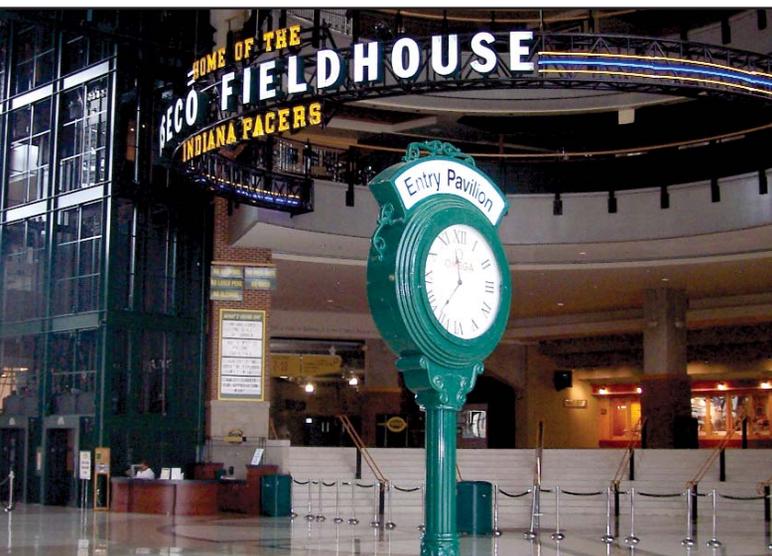
"The Colts are a very, very good team, one of the great offensive teams in football. At this point, though, it may be in their heads. They may need to be home throughout the playoffs," Costas theorizes. "The NFL regular season is the most meaningful in all of sports. The NBA and NHL have long been preludes to the playoffs. Baseball pennant races are diluted because there is almost no distinction between wild cards and division winners.

"But the NFL has enormous distinctions between various levels of qualifying for the playoffs," he continues. "A single game, two years ago, not being able to put the ball in the end zone on the goal line (cost the Colts a home game in the AFC Championship). Two fumbles in an early season game last year cost them."

Viewers can expect to see Costas as part of the NBC team covering the NFL when it returns to the network for the 2006 season. At that time, ESPN will be taking over the "Monday Night Football" package. NBC will have the Sunday night games. Costas is among those who see Sunday nights becoming the premier destination for football fans.

"ESPN is an enormous force and they do a great job over there, but you can't argue that "Monday Night Football" is the same as it used to be," he says. "The ESPN package will reach a smaller audience; there are no playoff games, no Super Bowls. In a way, the "Monday Night Football" package is moving to Sunday night."

Costas is often on the move himself. Despite his lengthy network career, he maintains his home in St. Louis. In addition to his various NBC assignments and his HBO show, he co-hosts HBO's "Inside the NFL" and earlier this year signed on to be the regular substitute host on CNN's "Larry King Live." Costas has earned 14 Sports Emmys® for broadcasting and two for writing.



Costas says Conseco Fieldhouse is a fitting tribute to the history of basketball in the state.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Bob Costas will be the keynote speaker for the Indiana Chamber's 16th Annual Awards Dinner on November 10 at the Indiana Convention Center. Call (800) 824-6885 or go to www.indianachamber.com to order your tickets.