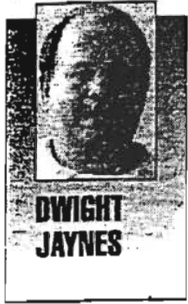


Blazers radio voice Doucette has best job



I have one of the best jobs in town, but I don't think a lot of people see it that way. They know I get good seats at all the games I want to see, but they may be a little put off by the writing part of this job — unaware of how easy it really is.

That's why the most coveted job in town actually belongs to Eddie Doucette. Everybody would like to have his assignment as the radio play-by-play man for the Portland Trail Blazers and they all figure they could easily handle it.

People sit around and dream about playing professional sports, but that's as far as it usually goes. The athletic talent it takes to play in the National Basketball Association is so far removed from most of us that we feel silly even dreaming about playing pro sports.

But the broadcasters, that's another story. We all figure we could handle that job. Right now. Bring it on. A sportscaster friend of mine used to tell me there are a few absolutes in his business: No. 1, everyone figures he can do your job better than you; No. 2, the

more your team wins, the better job you always seem to do; No. 3, the longer you stay with a particular team, the more accepted you become in that area.

Doucette has been in the business of broadcasting basketball since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar lived in Milwaukee. He agrees with the absolutes. And since moving into the chair once occupied by Bill Schonely, Doucette hasn't spent an awful lot of time worrying about any of those rules.

"The Shonz" spent 22 years and 2,062 games behind the Blazers radio microphone. Doucette slid into the same seat with the ease of Mickey Mantle taking over centerfield from Joe DiMaggio.

"People get used to you and develop a comfort zone," Doucette said. "It's like inviting someone into your house. But in the situation I'm in, really, replacing Bill bothered other people more than it did me.

"I wasn't intimidated. I've been doing it as long or longer than he has. I never felt I was competing with Bill Schonely. This is just a new chapter, a new challenge."

Broadcasting rule No. 2 has been Doucette's biggest problem. The team hasn't had the success it usually had during the recent past. Grumbling people often find fault with everyone, and for a while Doucette seemed a favorite target.

"The self-esteem of this city rises and falls with the team," Doucette said. "That's not real healthy. When the team is going well, everything is roses. In this city, adulation is almost blinding to some people. For the team, it's fantastic but for the city, well, I kind of wish we had a team in another major-league sport."

During the first month of the season, local sports talk shows were abuzz with complaints about Doucette. Those, though, have calmed as fans have grown accustomed to his auctioneer style. He's still a little too cute once in a while, but this is a true pro — a man who knows basketball and knows the NBA as well as any broadcaster working.

He's found a home — even though his heart has been elsewhere most of the season.

around

Doucette's youngest son, Cory, was readying for his senior year at Poway High School, north of San Diego, last fall when Doucette got the Blazers job. Doucette headed north, but the family stayed behind so Cory could complete his schooling there. Another son attended junior college in the same area.

Even though Doucette calls the Blazers organization "great — better even than I anticipated" anyone can understand why he's had a very tough season. Being a husband and father by remote control isn't easy.

"Brutal," Doucette said. "The worst experience I've ever had."

Cory was the starting point guard for Poway, a 5A power in Southern California this season. The team lost recently in the playoffs — while Doucette was in Texas. When you have spent a lifetime describing other people's athletic exploits, it's a killer not to be able to sit down and watch your own son play.

"They played 32 games, and I think I saw 12 of them," Doucette said. "I missed his last six games. I call home once or twice a day, and I've flown home on off-days. It's been pretty expen-

sive."

It isn't really just watching the games themselves, it's the idea of being around to offer support or advice.

"One night we were in an airplane and he was at the foul line with a one-and-one and a game on the line," Doucette said. "He missed, and I wasn't there for him. He had a great year, though, and won some games for his team. I just wish I could have been there more. Those are times I can't ever recover.

"My wife has done a great job with both our boys. Our oldest is going to be going to a four-year college next year and Cory may come up here to Willamette or Linfield. It'll be nice to be together again. My wife will be up here next season. I just hope we can sell our house — which isn't easy down there right now.

"It's been absolutely brutal. I love what I do, but we pay the price. I haven't seen the family in almost a month. I just have to suck it up and keep going."

Even the best job in town has its bad side.