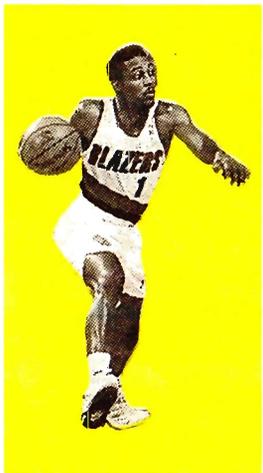


EDDIE DOUCETTE



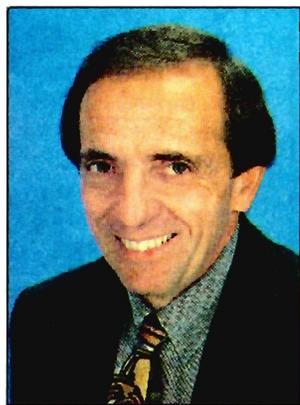
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COVER STORY

EDDIE DOUCETTE



'I want blind people to tell me they can see the game and feel the excitement,' says Doucette

All-time great line from an NBA radio broadcast: Lakers down by 20 against the Knicks. Riley sends in Kurt Rambis to spell Kareem, take a few elbows from Ewing. Which he does. After Riley brings Rambis back to the bench three minutes later with the Lakers down 25, Chick Hearn summarizes the entire Lakers struggle with a single comment. "Fans," says a pained Chick, "Kurt Rambis sitting on the bench looks like he just got his hair combed with an egg beater."

It is wrong that sports announcers earn their reputations during the championship moments, for it is during the lulls in the action, those many stretches of inglorious boredom, that these men who are part-reporter, part-entertainer earn their place in the hearts of fans. How hard could it be, after all, to scream "Havlicek stole the ball! Havlicek stole the ball!" or even "Cubs win! Cubs win!" when everyone else in the joint is screaming the same thing? Ross Perot could call the World Series and people would still listen.

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Doucette invokes the spirit of ex-Raider punter Ray Guy, uses the phrase "electric legs" at least five times during James Robinson's brief stint on the floor, sings a bar of "Got My Mojo Working," says Tracy Murray reminds him of a young Saint Bernard (the dog, not the deity), reports on the incubator-like temperature in the coliseum by asking, "Are they raising chickens in here?" and predicts that if Gary Payton keeps up the cocky hothead



'I want blind people to tell me they can see the game and feel the excitement,' says Doucette

by Chuck Thompson

It is wrong that sports announcers earn their reputations during the championship moments, for it is during the lulls in the action, those many stretches of inglorious boredom, that these men who are part-reporter, part-entertainer earn their place in the hearts of fans. How hard could it be, after all, to scream "Havlicek stole the ball! Havlicek stole the ball!" or even "Cubs win! Cubs win!" when everyone else in the joint is screaming the same thing? Ross Perot could call the World Series and people would still listen.

Broadcasting greatness means keeping the folks at home tuned in when their team is ten games out of first place, down 20 on the road and playing like dogs late in the season. Which brings us to Eddie Doucette, the Blazers play-by-play announcer who, along with Hearn and the Knicks' Marv Albert, is one of the three best broadcasters currently working in the NBA. The guy who doesn't appreciate Eddie Doucette calling a basketball game is the same guy who only watches during the playoffs with his team up three games to none. In Rip City such non-fans are not exactly a problem, which makes Doucette pretty much perfect for Portland.

"When I started out in this business my whole goal was to make the game as exciting to the listener as it was to me in-person," says the 52-year-old Doucette, who has built his success on an inimitable rapid-

fire delivery and never-ending file of quirky, personal idioms. "I wanted blind people to tell me that they could see the game and feel the excitement. And I've accomplished that. I've had blind people write and tell me those things."

March 13. It's still the first quarter of the heavily anticipated Blazers-Sonics game, but the thing is already a rout in favor of Seattle, the kind of game that challenges the creativity of even the most gifted broadcaster. Undaunted, Doucette goes to work comparing Sonics Coach George Karl to Professor Irwin Corey, calling him "brilliant at times, wacky the rest." He moans good-naturedly that the Blazers look so bad, choosing a Player of the Game might be impossible. When broadcast partner Mike Rice reports that every freshman and his high school brother is going to beat the NBA's 1995 rookie salary cap by coming out of college for the NBA draft next year, Doucette hilariously ponders the chances of a generic stiff he calls "Jaime LaRue from Pottstown State." After a rare hang-time maneuver from Rod Strickland he says the Blazers guard "should be coached by someone from the FAA." When it's reported Jaren Jackson is excited about his alma mater Georgetown getting into the NCAA tournament Doucette deadpans, "He should have been a little more excited about playing here

tonight." Following a Drexler air-ball he says, "Folks, Clyde missed everything but the floor."

Doucette invokes the spirit of ex-Raider punter Ray Guy, uses the phrase "electric legs" at least five times during James Robinson's brief stint on the floor, sings a bar of "Got My Mojo Working," says Tracy Murray reminds him of a young Saint Bernard (the dog, not the deity), reports on the incubator-like temperature in the coliseum by asking, "Are they raising chickens in here?" and predicts that if Gary Payton keeps up the cocky hothead routine someone is going to "put his lips on the floor." And most of that comes before halftime!

"When this club stinks I let people know," says Doucette. "By the same token if I see something good out there I get excited about it. That's the flavor I bring to the game. I can bring the excitement and also the bad news."

By age 12 Doucette had already decided on a career as a sportscaster. He lived and died with the Red Sox in those days, listening to games on radio while growing up in Boston. "When they would win and lose, I would have good days and bad days, just like the folks here in this community with the Blazers," says Doucette. "The first time I went back to Boston to do a game at Fenway Park was one of my biggest thrills."

Doucette carried that thrombo-

sis-level enthusiasm for teams through his student years at Michigan State and on to the big leagues. So involved was he with games early in his career he once spent a two-minute commercial break during a Milwaukee Bucks-Kansas City Kings broadcast swapping punches with a drunken fan who had been screaming obscenities into Doucette's microphone throughout the evening. When the drunk started peppering his monologue with racial insults directed at players Doucette whirled

Dodgers and five other big league baseball clubs.

Mellowed or not, Doucette's pull-no-punches style of reporting has remained his trademark, but he admits to making some adjustments since arriving in Portland last season.

"My biggest problem is that I've got a metropolitan sense of humor and sometimes in the more conservative areas it doesn't always fly," he says. "I'm constantly tweaking and trying to make sure we're not offending

sanity and self-respect. "Some lady didn't like me saying 'dry heave,'" Doucette informs his audience after he uses the term to describe an especially ill-considered shot by Mark Bryant during the Seattle broadcast. "She said to me, 'Have you ever had dry heaves?' I said, 'Yeah, they're ugly and it hurts. And that's the way those shots look. They're ugly and they hurt!'"

In the event a group is ever formed to protect the civil liberties of dry heave victims, Doucette may

the twisted psyche of the Blazers fan as well as anyone and he knows the bleak situation in Seattle calls for some humor and a little bit of the denial Blazers fans sometimes like to cling to when the team is going to seed. With seven minutes left in the game Doucette does what every Blazers player and fan wishes they could do. He starts the game over. He pushes the score back to 0-0 and begins calling the action as though picking it up from the opening tip.

"Jerooooome hits from the cor-



on the guy with a flurry, scattering a row of folding chairs like dominoes.

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people, but there's always fallout."

Doucette ignited the wrath of several organized groups last season

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on the guy with a flurry, scattering a row of folding chairs like dominoes.

"My engineer was sitting there holding the stopwatch and he couldn't believe this," says Doucette. "He's yelling, 'We got a minute! We got a minute!' We got all the way down to 15 seconds when the police broke us up and as I turned around the engineer says, 'You're on!' and I grabbed the microphone and just said, 'Hello again everybody, here we are back in Omaha!'"

For obvious reasons, Doucette forced himself to relax a little, decided not take the games so personally. "I had to pull myself back because I was burning myself out," he says. "Now I can go about my job and not get so carried away I end up with an ulcer at the end of every season."

Since that first professional job with the Bucks, Doucette has gone on to announce for the Denver Nuggets, Indiana Pacers, Los Angeles Clippers, USA Television Network, Mutual Broadcasting Network, Los Angeles Rams, Los Angeles

people, but there's always fallout."

Doucette ignited the wrath of several organized groups last season with what he believed was a fairly innocuous on-air commentary concerning the deficiencies of an especially weak Philadelphia 76er team.

"I said, 'You don't have to hide the women and children when the 76ers come to town,'" recalls Doucette. "My thought being, they're not going to scare anybody. But some people read things into that statement and I got hauled over the bamboo cane on this thing because somebody misread what I was saying."

The hyper-sensitive '90s are frustrating for any professional who makes a living with words while McCarthyesque amateurs busy themselves finding offense at even the slightest unsavory reference. Doucette made amends in the "women and children" affair, but he's also developed the thick skin necessary for anyone in broadcasting who wants to hang on to some sense of

consider dropping the phrase from his repertoire of witticisms, but for now he's doing things his way. "I think you will see the day of the wordsmith decline," he says with understandable regret. "I do not have an eraser on the end of my tongue. When it's gone, it's gone. There are a lot of action groups out there and the wordsmith may have to get so esoteric with his use of the language that most people won't understand it. I don't want to do that. I don't understand that."

It's the fourth quarter in Seattle, the Blazers are down 23 and guys like Steve Scheffler are playing instead of guys like Shawn Kemp. For hard-core fans this is called garbage time. For everyone else it's called "Let's go rent a video" time. For Doucette it's the time he really earns his paycheck. He's been in Portland just two years, but the childhood of fanatical devotion to the beloved Red Sox has prepared him well for Blazermania. Doucette understands

ner and it's 2-1," Doucette explodes in a bulldog voice more suggestive of an NBA Final than a late season road blowout. He keeps the joke going through the rest of the game, giving "new game" and "old game" scores and stats in the same breath. "Murray hits and that makes it new game 8-4 Blazers, old game 105-86 Sonics." It's one of the worst Blazers defeats of the season, but suddenly the Blazers are winning and the game is fun again. The whimsical routine is a stroke of brilliance and it speaks volumes about the character of Eddie Doucette who, after 32 years in broadcasting, still likes taking chances, throwing a few off-balance punches and rooting for the home team.

"My whole philosophy is to do it differently," says a still-driven Doucette. "My dad told me, 'If you're gonna make a name for yourself in this business, do it your way.' Stick your nose out there, try something different. You can't steal second with your foot on first."