



Photo by fern Uyetake

With Portland in the NBA playoffs, Eddie Doucette has been plenty busy of late.

Voice of experience

When Charbonneau's Eddie Doucette talks, Trail Blazer fans listen

By **DANA HAYNES**

For The Spokesman

When Eddie Doucette talks, you can hear the blues.

It's in the staccato bursts of words, which sound like they're fighting to see which gets out of his mouth first. It's in the syncopated rhythms of his home-grown banter.

It's in the been-there-done-that tone of a little boy who clung to every tinny, transistorized word of Boston Red Sox games, who then grew up to live his dream only to find the dream a bit tarnished, a bit tainted.

For the past two years, Doucette, a Charbonneau resident, has been one of the voices

of the Portland Trail Blazers, first on radio, and this season on television. He's the play-by-play announcer, the guy who walks the audience through the game, explaining nuances, describing plays and generating energy and excitement, even when the team is playing poorly.

"It's a hell of a job," says Doucette, his booming voice belying his small, wiry frame. "But you gotta know, it's a lot like the blues. It's telling people about life; making it sound interesting. You dress it up, put a little whipped cream on it, but it's the same as it was a hundred years ago."

Paving a new career

Doucette, 52, was raised in and around Boston, where his influences included Jim Britt and Tom Hussey, then the voices of the Red Sox.

"I lived and died with those guys," Doucette says. "I vowed that, if I ever got to do this, I'd

make it as exciting for fans as they made it for me."

He attended Michigan State University in the mid-1960s, studying communications, broadcasting and debate. And, in 1968, he landed a job. Not in his beloved baseball, but in the young, unpopular and poorly understood National Basketball Association.

His first job was with the Milwaukee Bucks. "I was young and scared," he says grinning. "The only instructions I had from the general manager were: 'Look, this is pro basketball. This is totally alien to these people. I don't know how you're gonna do this, Eddie, but you've got one year to do it.'"

And he did, creating a popularity for hoops that can be felt around Wisconsin today.

"I developed a young fan following. That fan following became the season ticket holders of today," he says.

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Doucette

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Jon McGlocklin played for the Bucks back then, proudly bearing the monicker "Jonnie Mac," given to him by Doucette. When McGlocklin retired he became a color commentator — the secondary announcer who adds interesting information beyond the play-by-play.

And his first partner was Doucette.

"He's extremely talented," McGlocklin says. "He's a combination of creative and entertaining, without being overbearing or egotistical."

If Milwaukee represents Doucette's first great foray into his dream-come-true, it also is a time of painful memories. Eddie and Karen Doucette had their first son, Brett, in 1974. In December 1976, Brett was diagnosed with leukemia.

Rather than just deal with his own pain, Eddie and "Jonnie Mac" came up with the idea of Midwest Athletes Against Childhood Cancer, also known as the MacFund. McGlocklin remains president of the fund today.

Nineteen years later, the MacFund raises close to \$1 million a year for childhood cancer research at Wisconsin hospitals.

"This has been a labor of love for my wife and myself, and a phenomenal job by Jonnie," Doucette says. "Helping found the MacFund is the single most important thing I've done in my life."

The Doucettes left Wisconsin because Brett needed a warmer climate. They moved to San Diego. Today, Brett is a healthy junior at the University of San Diego.

The Doucettes' second son, Co-

ry, plays basketball as a sophomore at Linfield College in McMinnville.

And while his fund-raising remains active in Milwaukee, Doucette's voice isn't heard there anymore. That's too bad, McGlocklin says.

"I loved working with Eddie. I'd love to still be working with him. I think the (Blazers) and your city are the winners for having him. And I think I'm saying that objectively, as an announcer."

Covering the territory

Doucette stayed in Milwaukee 19 years, but from there he caromed around the league, serving as an announcer for the NBA's Denver Nuggets, Indiana Pacers and Los Angeles Clippers. He handled play-by-play duties for NBA Radio, where he called the 1992 Western Conference Finals in which Portland defeated the Utah Jazz.

He also bounced in and out of Major League Baseball, working as the television announcer for the Los Angeles Dodgers and serving limited duty with five other big-league clubs. He broadcast football games for the Los Angeles Rams and covered various games for the Mutual Broadcasting Network.

"We go way back," says Bobby "Slick" Leonard, the voice of the Indiana Pacers. "Eddie came up with a lot of sayings that were copied by other people; stuff like 'up the boulevard' and 'sky hook.' Dick Vitale (announcer for ESPN and ABC) copied a bunch of Eddie's stuff."

While working for the USA Network in 1981-82, Doucette was teamed up with former Trail Blazer Steve Jones. "That's back when the NBA was in its infancy on cable,"

Jones says.

They became friends. "Eddie has a phenomenal talent," the University of Oregon standout recalls. "He's interesting in that he always has a lot of irons in the fire."

"He's the Next Generation of 'Star Trek,'" Jones explains, laughing at his own farfetched metaphor. "You know on that show, how they all have different faces, different missions, different reasons for being there? That's Eddie. He's got a lot of personalities running around in there."

Three years ago, Jones began lobbying to get Doucette a job in Portland. Lending a hand was Lake Oswego's Nick Bunick, who had befriended Doucette two decades ago in Milwaukee.

"I'd been trying to get Eddie here for years," Bunick said. "He's great, especially on the radio. You actually think you're watching the game, although you're only watching it in your mind's eye."

Bunick once served as color commentator for Doucette, when the Bucks came to Portland and the regular announcer was unavailable. Doucette knew his old friend was in the crowd and asked him to help out.

When the Blazers hired Doucette to be their radio man for the 1992-93 season, he moved to Lake Oswego. Recently, he moved again, out to a bigger place in Charbonneau.

Perspective

Doucette's working life has revolved around announcing, but he also has a pragmatic view of the industry and its relative importance in the world.

"I've had periods of frustration," he says, throwing in a shrug for

effect. "I've always had these dreams, and I was knocking on the door to get to the Big Thing (national announcing). And it never happened. That's been frustrating."

If there's another frustration he feels, it's with players who strut and flaunt their multi-million-dollar contracts.

"Professional basketball players? Man, they're a different breed of cat. They've always been a little into themselves, but it's more so today," he says. "I don't know. I haven't seen one of these guys create a cure for cancer. To my mind, that's a superstar."

Doucette also has little patience for fans who put too much importance on what is, after all, just a game.

"Let's get balanced!" he booms. "People act like it's a gloomy day when the team loses. I've seen my son almost die. Hey — there are more important things."