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- Management
- Programming
- Engineering
- Promotion
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The Morning Team





May 1983

About the cover:

As the sun slowly rises in the east, WPGC's morning team runs a quarterback sneak on Washington's sleepy listeners. Pictured, left to right: Glenn Beck, Joe Theismann, Jay Robert Howe, and Dave Foxx. Photos by Reed Bunzel.

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The Morning Team

Every weekday, radio's morning teams wake America up and send it on its way with music, features—and teamwork. *RadioActive's* **Reed Bunzel** profiles the morning shift at Washington, D.C.'s WPGC AM/FM—a team that even has its own quarterback.....



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The Morning Team

The clichés abound: golden rays of early morning sun cascade through the stately pines, exhaust-belching cars trundle over the potholes of the Capital Beltway, a few early birds scramble for their worms. And high up on the eighth floor of a concrete and glass office complex, located in Morningside, Maryland, the WPGC morning team gets ready to hit the airwaves.

Nothing unusual here. Across the country, in large markets and small, wherever radio signals penetrate, "drive time" jocks are gearing up for one more adventure. They hover over cups of thick coffee, highlight wire copy, clip newspapers, and discard stacks of mail-order jokes. Within the hour America's alarm clocks will jolt commuters, housewives, school children, and overnight security guards from their sleep. The radios click on, and out comes the

by Reed Bunzel

familiar patter and chatter, news and views, sports and reports that get radio's prime time listeners off to a comfortable start.

Another day has begun.

It is six o'clock straight up. Michael Jackson stops whining about a kid that isn't his, and Dave Foxx—morning jock and technician extraordinaire—ejects the cart from the player and pops in another. He cues News Director Jay Robert Howe, partially visible through the angled glass window, to begin the news. Then, as last night's events are announced to bleary-eyed, news-hungry listeners, Joe Theismann takes his first call of the day.

That's right—Joe Theismann! Winning superbowl XVII Washington Redskins' quarterback, heartthrob to all the ladies,

pal to DC area armchair-bookies, Joe is more than a football jock. He is a radio jock. And a good one, at that.

Joe blinks at the phone and holds it away from his ear. Another anxious fan is on the other end, bubbling about the Superbowl and wondering where she can get tickets to the new Washington Federals' games. As politely as possible at six in the morning, he suggests the ticket office. Not at all disappointed—after all, where else can listeners regularly talk to a superstar quarterback—she thanks him and hangs up. Joe punches the next button down the line. "Good morning—WPGC."

In the news booth Jay Robert shuffles his newspaper clips and wire copy: the Pope is in Central America... another Russian spy has been caught... unemployment holds steady at 10.4 percent... parachute packers make \$8.76

The triple threat of the WPGC morning team: (l to r) Dave Foxx, Jay Robert Howe, and Joe Theismann.



an hour... the Caps beat the Rangers last night... running back John Riggins has just signed a fantastic contract with the Redskins....

"Maybe now he'll hire me as his driver," Theismann quips as he thumps the console panel with his palms.

A local spot is followed by some more news, then Foxx takes the board back. A button is punched and DC-area listeners are greeted with the Beach Boys' plea for Rhonda's help. Right on schedule.

"That's the magic of this entire show," Jay Robert explains. "The whole thing comes off like clockwork. Dave runs the tightest board I know, and ours has a marvelous sound. He also taught Joe the business."

All right. Just what does Joe know about the business? What does any quarterback who hurls an oblong, pigskin ball over a pack of bloodthirsty tacklers know about coming out of a stop-set, or stepping on somebody's time?

"In the beginning I stepped all over everything," Theismann admits. "I stepped on commercials, I stepped all over Dave, and almost crushed him a couple times. I knew absolutely nothing about the radio industry when I first got involved as a disc jockey."

Dave Foxx grins as he remembers: "In the beginning Joe was absolutely horrendous. But he caught on very quickly, and by the end of his first week was so good we decided to keep him around for a little while."

Theismann is very grateful for the trade tricks Foxx taught him. "The three most important things I learned from Dave were to talk into the microphone, to realize I am not going to get an immediate response every time I say something, and to think things out before I speak. I have a tendency to be too wordy, and I had to learn to condense all my thoughts into very short verses so they would fit in between the records and the spots and the other things we do."

Program Director Jerry Steele came to work at WPGC after Joe had polished up his radio act, and was thoroughly impressed by what he heard. "Joe Theismann is a superstar, and he loves being on radio. You always think of football stars being inarticulate or uneducated. I was very surprised when I first heard Joe on the radio. We see and hear football players on TV, and they don't hold a candle to Joe. He can talk

about things besides football. He talks about his wife and kids, and listeners can relate to this. He just loves to be on the radio."

Obviously Theismann is an important player in the station's ratings race, but he is not singled out as the show's superstar. In fact, his frenetic schedule forces him to miss a couple days each week.

"Seven o'clock is all-important. This hour is *the* hour. We've programmed every single possibility, so that at every break we know exactly what we are doing."
—Jay Robert Howe

"Of course, we do play up his contribution to the team effort," Steele says. "Everyone knows who he is, and he sure isn't going to hurt us. But above all else, we are the morning team. The whole station is a team, and if everything works together we know it. Radio is like a football game—just look at the Washington Redskins. They had no real 'superstars.' They had 24, maybe 26 free agents on that football team. A year and a half ago everybody laughed at them. But now—it's all a team effort. They built that team, and that team won."

Coming up close to the top of the hour: 7:00. The crucial hour in radio. Dave is frantically splicing a tape as Men At Work boast about the land down under. Joe takes another call, while Jay Robert checks the local papers, wire copy, and television for additional news stories. He glances fondly at his TV set. "How can I begin my day without Jane Pauley talking to me in that soothing tone of hers?" he laughs.

Joe finishes his latest telephone conversation and climbs out of his cramped seat that resembles the crowded cockpit of a turbo-charged Italian racecar. Foxx outros the music, cues the news booth

once again, and the latest update begins. More about the Russian spy... some confusion about possible EPA mismanagement... the recession may be almost over. Jay Robert takes a breath. "Now let's go to Glenn Beck, with Road Watch," he announces.

A toot of a horn, and Beck comes on with his first traffic report. He is the new kid in town, fresh in from Utah, and is responsible for compiling the all-important report of traffic conditions in the Washington metro area. "We have a tie-up on the Cabin John Bridge, an accident on the inner loop of the Beltway just past 270, and traffic lights are out on New York Avenue—things are pretty much normal—"

"Hey Glenn," Theismann calls over his mike. "You still out there on that little bicycle of yours, pedaling all over town, causing all those delays?"

Glenn smiles, undaunted. "Joe, as a policeman once told me, 'You have the right to remain silent.' Exercise it, will ya?"

The reproached quarterback cracks up, thumps his palms against the arms of his chair, and Foxx hits the cart machines. Off into another musical cut.

"Seven o'clock is all-important," Jay Robert observes as Joe stops laughing. "This hour is *the* hour. We've programmed every single possibility, so that at every break we know exactly what we are doing. The great thing about the arrangement we have now is that Dave is super-technician. He handles everything. You'll notice he is right on time. At 7:15, if our listeners are at a certain place, or are doing something they habitually do at that time, the show is an audio post for them. They can tell by where we are whether they are on time, or a little behind, or even a little ahead."

One continuing feature every morning is the Topic of the Day. Each morning a different subject is selected, and listeners are invited to call in and contribute their views. Topics range from favorite TV programs to current movies to civic issues—whatever comes to mind. This morning Joe is taking calls on the issue of parenting.

"The four lines are always ringing off the hook," Foxx explains. "This morning we're showcasing Joe—Superbowl quarterback—as a parent. Where else would you ever hear Joe's philosophy about being a good parent?"

“There is a real similarity between this morning team and the Redskins. There is a reliance on one another to make the whole thing work.”

—Joe Theismann

Theismann, his ear glued to the phone, signals Foxx that this call might be a good one to record and play back later in the program. He chatters away with a mother who doesn't believe in spanking, and shares a little of his own philosophy.

Foxx looks over and cues Joe to get ready for a live I.D. Theismann cordially wishes the caller a good morning, adjusts himself in his tight seat, and lifts the microphone to his mouth. “Good morning. This is Joe Theismann, with Dave Foxx and Jay Robert Howe, on WPGC.” He raises his eyebrows, shrugs, and sets the mike down. Simple enough.

“There is a real similarity between this morning team and the Redskins,” he observes once the music is playing again. “With any team that works together there is a reliance on one another to make the whole thing work. A good deal of preparation goes into it for each member of the team. There's a confidence that the other person can play off of. These things are present in a good football team, as well as in a disc jockey team.”

As a program director, Jerry Steele is quite pleased with the entire contents of the morning show. “At a lot of stations around the country—large and small—all program decisions come from the

programming department. Here the guys do it all themselves. What makes a good morning show is that people want to be entertained and want a companion. The station also has to be fun to listen to. Radio is so diversified, so fragmented, that you can turn anywhere in this market—or any other—and find three or four stations playing the same kind of music. What we have to do is appeal to what people want. By having the right mix in the morning, the right people, the right features, we can do that.”

Jay Robert agrees that this is the key to the show's success. “In a lot of large markets the announcers announce, and the production people do all the technical work. This team does it all. Dave is a master of technical expertise—he does the splicing, plays the carts, that sort of thing. Joe does his announcing bit and takes his phone calls. My responsibility is putting the news together, with the help of Glenn and Ann Donnelly.”

“It all comes down to planning,” Foxx adds as he selects an oldie from the cart rack. “Joe has no technical expertise, and I know nothing about the news, and Jay Robert doesn't play pro football. So we all have something important to contribute. Everything is planned out ahead of time. This doesn't mean we don't ad-

lib—of course we do. Sometimes it might screw up the polish, but it can also add magic.”

According to the itemized program log, it is time for Day Off With Pay, a daily promotion feature targeted to the large working segment of the audience. Each day a different listener is selected to receive a day off with full pay, in cooperation with the listener's employer. Joe picks up the phone, dials the number, and waits for an answer.

“Good morning,” Theismann chirps brightly. “Is this Beverly Myers in Annandale? This is Joe Theismann calling.”

Yeah, right.

“I'm calling from WPGC,” he continues. “I have a letter here from your daughter that I'd like to read to you.”

“Over the air?” the woman asks suspiciously.

Joe laughs, reads selected sentences from the daughter's epistle, and then informs the woman she can take the day off, with full pay.

There is a short pause, followed by a squeal of delight. “That's wonderful! Just fabulous! Thank you, Joe...and thank you, WPGC.”

“I love this stuff,” Joe grins as he hangs up the phone. “I just really enjoy it. I love being a disc jockey. I love the music, and—a lot of people won't believe this—it relaxes me. It sets the tone for the entire day. It gives me the opportunity to talk to people and let them know that Joe Theismann is not just a football player, but that he is an individual, he does have opinions that he's not afraid to express, and that he genuinely cares about people. Having the opportunity to talk on the radio for the better part of a morning is a wonderful feeling.”



Theismann's regular appearance on the airwaves does not make WPGC the "football station," but athletics do tend to creep into the show every now and then. Joe delivers the sports scores from the night before, and offers his personal comments about upcoming games.

"During the football season, of course, Joe can't be here," Howe notes. "But he returned right after the Superbowl, and he was here during the strike. We were really lucky then, because Joe would give us first-hand reports from New York telling us what was going on."

Shortly before the Superbowl, a radio station in Miami learned that Theismann was part of the morning team at WPGC, and contacted the morning team by phone. A friendly little wager was made on the outcome of the game. "I won't identify the station," Howe laughs, "but they called up and made a deal with us. They promised that if the Redskins won the Superbowl, they would sing the Redskins fight song over the air in Miami. And like the good sports we are, we agreed to sing that silly Dolphins song if by chance they lucked out and were victorious."

So what happened when the time came to pay up? "As it happened, the station welched on its bet," Howe continues. "They wouldn't sing. A lot of Washington listeners got ticked off and wrote letters to the station, to Florida Congressmen, to the Miami Chamber of Commerce. A few even called WPGC and sang 'Hail To The Redskins' themselves. The Miami station started getting envelopes full of grape jelly (Welch's), and finally the pressure got to them. They gave in, and sang a song that goes like this: 'Hail to the Redskins, hail to the Redskins, they won the 'Bowl, Riggins is

"A radio show is a lot like a suit of clothes. Lots of suits come right off the rack and don't wear well. Our show is like a finely-tailored suit."

—Jay Robert Howe

great, yeah, yeah, yeah—are you happy now?"

Dave Foxx cues up the next cart and a commercial spot, while Theismann starts in on This Day In History—a daily feature recapping important events from years past. Today is the day the Confederate "Stars and Bars" were adopted in 1861, the same day Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as president. The first transcontinental marathon began this day back in 1928, and it is also Knute Rockne's birthday. Theismann eats this up—he eats up anything that has to do with football, especially Notre Dame football. A few celebrity birthdays come next, followed by a spot for a local jeans outlet, and then the music begins again.

"When I was a kid, I used to have this radio fantasy," Theismann recalls. "I would have loved to have been a disc jockey. I grew up outside New York, and we got Cousin Bruce and all those things when we were down on the Jersey shore. I just really grew up at a time when radio was one of my best friends. It's funny—as a professional athlete, music is one of my great reliefs. Conversely, a lot of musicians I know—like the Jacksons, who always used to bring a basketball along when they traveled—find that

athletics is a great relief. The two businesses really do go together."

Coming up now on 9:00. Morning drive is almost over, traffic out on the beltway is thinning out, car radios are turned off and office radios click on. Theismann takes one last telephone call, then climbs out of his catbird seat and is gone. Beck is back with his last "Road Watch" report and then goes out for the morning's supply of Egg McMuffins and hash browns. Jay Robert recaps the morning news one last time, and the show winds down for another day.

"As I said before, everything runs right on schedule during the morning," Howe concludes. "It is important to know just where you should be at a certain time. A radio show is a lot like a suit of clothes. Lots of suits come right off the rack and don't wear well. Our show is like a finely-tailored suit. It is tailored to the individual. We've pretty much tailored it by the time we come in in the morning. Listeners listen by the clock, and do things by habit."

"I guess William James said it best: 'I live by habit and for excitement.' I guess that's what we're all about." □

Reed Bunzel is editor of RadioActive.

