

Terry Allen was the consummate storyteller

YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

In the early years of Monday Night Football, during the fourth quarter of a particularly dreadful Raiders-Alten blowout, the ABC cameras panned to a man in a nearby empty section of bleachers.

He had appeared to be snoozing, but he awoke with a start, looked directly at the camera lens and raised his hand, middle finger extended. This being before TV's famous "seven-second delay," millions of viewers were treated to the obscene gesture. In that instant, I'm guessing cups of coffee were spilled into the laps of ABC producers everywhere.

"Dandy" Don Meredith, the folksy former Cowboys quarterback doing color for the ABC Monday Night crew, coolly drawled to Howard Cosell, "Howard, I think that fella means we're No. 1."

It was perfect. Vintage. I'm not alone in thinking of those Monday nights of Cosell, Meredith and Frank Gifford as the glory days of NFL broadcasting. Just as I will always recall the 1970s and early 1980s as the glory days of the Class A basketball tournament. Those were the days when it was, yes, just A, not IA, when the tournament was held at the University of Puget Sound, when hundreds of fans were turned away from every session because the interest was so rampant and the fieldhouse just wasn't big enough.

And when the only way to hear it was to listen to Terry Allen and Dick Stark.

At the time, they were working for KPUG in Bellingham, but because they had bid for and received the state feed, their broadcasts were picked up by many stations around the state. And why not? Why would anybody want to listen to anybody else when you could hear the best?

Stark was Mister Excitable. A Dick Vitale before there was Dick Vitale, his enthusiasm and knowledge of the game unassailable. Allen was the smooth-as-butter storyteller, the king of the one-liner, his anecdotal wit sometimes overshadowing the fact that, yes, his analysis of every game was spot-on.

Stark calls him "the best storyteller I ever heard in my life," a guy who could come up with the brilliant one-liner that would capture the moment. Typical of that was the postseason high school all-star game in the late 1970s when Blair Rasmussen — who would go on to star at Oregon and play in the NBA — was doing absolutely nothing. Not rebounding, not scoring, not helping his team.

At halftime, Stark asked Allen, "What's the University of Oregon going to do with Blair Rasmussen?"

Allen's response: "I think they're going to bronze him and put him in front of a library."

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SANDBERRY/Was voice of state Class A prep basketball tourneys in 70s and 80s

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Continued from Page 1B

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If you looked into the stands at any of those games, you'd see dozens, even hundreds of people with their little Walkman radios, earplugs in their ears, listening to Dick and Terry. It was as if they couldn't understand what they were seeing — or, perhaps, couldn't truly enjoy it — without hearing about it from Dick Stark and Terry Allen.

Those two worked the Class A tournament together for three decades before moving up to 2A with the WIAA's reclassification prior to the 1997-98 school year. They worked this year's 2A tourney just three weeks before Terry's death last week following a stroke.

Terry's passing is a huge loss in this state's sports community.

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Terry was a lot of things: a principled guy who would go to bat for a friend in need, a consummate professional, absolutely unflappable under pressure and a burstout storyteller so engaging that you absolutely wanted to be on the next burstout.

And, of course, he was the guy who knew just what to say.

Once, at the Whatcom County League's district tourney, a furious fan of a team that had just lost — one who had listened on his transistor radio to KPUG's broadcast and apparently blamed his team's loss on Stark and Allen — was attempting to force his way into the door of their broadcasting booth.

Stark and a security officer were trying to keep the shouting.

agitated man out of the booth while Terry Allen wrapped up the game. Terry was finding the whole thing a little funny — typical Terry — and couldn't help but mention the noise to his listeners since the shouting was clearly audible.

Stark doesn't remember what Terry said. But I'm sure it was a perfect line from a guy sports fans around the state should and will miss like a treasure lost. I like to think Terry grinned and said something like this:

"Folks, I believe that fella thinks we're No. 1."

Because Terry Allen sure was.

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