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(F11C)

1st FM sportscaster to go national

Zaret takes syndicated show on the road

By C.J. RISAK

Being in the right place at the right time is often the key to success.

In Eli Zaret's case, you can add having the right voice to those first ingredients to get some of the answer to his rise to fame.

Zaret is a radio sportscaster who's career and popularity have simultaneously skyrocketed. And, while his talent shouldn't be underestimated, breaks have certainly played a part.

"It was kind of thrust upon me," Zaret said last Monday, just after broadcasting his first national show to 194 stations.

"I was doing some work for a cable television station in Ann Arbor. Someone decided it was time to do a quote, 'hip' sports show. I was the one they chose."

Being a sportscaster is not unusual in itself, but being a successful sportscaster on the FM dial, where continuous music is the main attraction, is. And that's just where Zaret has been for the past 4 1/2 years.

He got his start with WABX-FM in October, 1974, doing a commentary show on national sports events.

"I was stuck in that commentary role at WABX," Zaret reflected. "I wanted to get local orientation, and I got that when I started at WJZZ. Now, with my syndicated show, I have the best of both."

got that when I started at WJZZ (in 1975).

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ZARET, WHO WAS chosen from out of hundreds of applicants, didn't always find things easy at WJZZ. Low pay gave him little motivation, and he finally quit for a month before coming back to "beg for a morning show."

"FM sports is a new concept, and they were hesitant to give me a morning show. I like things much better here. My loyalties are very strong to WRIF."

But, while luck might have had something to do with Zaret getting the opportunity for his show, other things have contributed to his success.

His raspy voice is probably the most noticeable, giving him an attraction similar to that of another famous New York sportscaster, Howard Cosell. Zaret grew up in New York, watching the Brooklyn Dodgers in their final days before the franchise moved to Los Angeles.

Another ingredient that contributes to his success was the type of show he offered.

"I deal with the emotional and the dramatic, not just who wins and losses," he said. "My different type of voice helps."

"But, as far as being on the FM, there was this old taboo back in the late '60s about sports, that they weren't cool, that they symbolized the establishment, the old guard."

"But that's not true. Sports goes through all classes. It appealed to the hippie as much as anyone."

"I guess, being on the FM, people figure I'm some kind of radical, but I'm not really. I'm really very apolitical. I sympathize with some causes, but I never took part in a demonstration or anything."

ALTHOUGH ZARET HAD all the tools to be a good sportscaster, he had, like all beginners, his problems.

"People have this conception that athletes are unapproachable. They are approachable. It's part of their job to talk to you, just like it's part of my job to talk to them."

"I just try to make them relax. I find that they talk more freely then. It's my job, my role. But it takes experience. I idolized some of these athletes when I was a kid, too."

One of Zaret's most difficult interviews had to do with one of those boyhood heroes, Hank Aaron, the baseball great who was finishing his career with the Milwaukee Brewers.

When Zaret approached Aaron for an

interview, he got a brushoff from the career homerun hitter, who said he would "talk to him later."

"I didn't understand it then, but he'd done millions of interviews, and was always besieged by reporters. After he finished his pre-game warm up, after he'd taken batting practice, then he called the reporters together and talked to them for a few minutes."

"It was my first tough experience, but it taught me to pick the right time." Zaret's syndicated 90-second broadcast, heard once a day, will deal with matters of national interest, and will also incorporate some of the more "offbeat" sports. But he will keep his local sports show, as well.

So, what does Eli think about some of the Detroit teams chances?

"The Tigers are unfortunate enough to be in the toughest division in baseball. They haven't been aggressive enough in the free agent market, whatever their reasons."

Jason Thompson thinks they are in business to make money, not to win ballgames."

How about the Pistons and Michigan State University star Earvin Johnson, who is considering going pro?

"I think he'll go pro. His bargaining power will never be greater."

"The Pistons will improve, but I don't think they'll get Johnson. They'll

probably draft Greg Kelsey (Johnson's teammate). Johnson should do very well in the pro game, he's suited for it."

That's how Eli sees it. And, if popularity means anything, it would seem that a lot of tend to agree.



Eli Zaret greets his new national audience with his 90-second sports program, heard in 194 cities coast-to-coast.

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— Eli Zaret, sportscaster for WRIF-FM.

Our Lady of Mercy thinclads take 10th at Spartan Relays

By TOM BAER

Farmington Our Lady of Mercy, which finished ninth in the Class A girls' track finals last year, showed last Saturday that it still has some of the state's most talented runners.

Mercy, coached by Bob Kirkland, scored 11 team points and finished 10th in the field of 23 Class A schools at the Spartan Relays at Michigan State University's Jensen Fieldhouse.

"Our performances this year are way ahead of last year's in terms of times," Kirkland said. "Unfortunately for us, so are the performances of three quarters of the teams in the state."

Mercy's best finish of the day came in the 880-yard run, where senior Michele Collins finished third with a time of 2:25.5. Collins also scored in the mile run, taking sixth place with a 5:29.2 clocking.

"I was expecting her to score in the

880, but not to finish as high as third place," Kirkland said. "She was really a pleasant surprise."

Mercy scored in two other events, the mile relay and the sprint medley relay.

Mercy's sprint medley crew (Julie Basford, Cathie Bridges, Kathy Whelan and Sherry West) finished fifth with a time of 1:55.0. Mercy's mile relay (Carol Basford, Julie Basford, Bridges and West) recorded a 4:16.5 to finish fifth.

Two other area girls' track teams, West Bloomfield and Farmington Harrison, were entered in the Spartan Relays. Neither team scored.

West Bloomfield's best shot came in the 880-yard relay. The team (Monique Ozimkowski, Lisa Gagnon, Lisa Fitzekam and Vivian McKenzie) posted a 1:50.0.

"They're a good bunch, but their

passes weren't too good that day," said West Bloomfield coach Lee Averill.

"Once they get some meets behind them, they'll be tough."

Harrison's 880 relay (Linda Tremonti, Carolyn Leeson, Beth Dilley and Dawn Johnson) couldn't score with a 2:05.6. Other Harrison performances at the Spartans: Terri Duckett, 5-2 in the high jump; Sue Kutinsky, 14:13.9 in the two mile run; and Celia Black, 3:05.0 in the 880 run.

Flint Northern won the Spartan Relays, scoring 42 points. Detroit Mumford followed with 40, Pontiac Central had 30, Detroit Mackenzie 20, and Benton Harbor, Dearborn and Rochester High tied with 18 each.

On Tuesday (April 24), West Bloomfield runs at Waterford Kettering. Harrison hosts Southfield High, Farmington hosts Waterford Mott and North Farmington travels to Westland John Glenn. On Friday (April 27), Mercy runs Detroit Dominican at Brother Rice in a 4:15 p.m. meet.

Win 4 events

Lakers top WLW field

West Bloomfield won four events and placed second in six more in winning the Walled Lake Western track and field relays last Saturday.

West Bloomfield topped the six-team field with 64 points. Brighton High finished second with 51 points, Milford-Lakefield had 50, West Western 30, Milford High 27 and Walled Lake Central 26.

The relay composed of Jeff Cox, Gary Schroeder, Jim Bitner and Bob Long accounted for two West Bloomfield firsts. The team posted a 1:35.2 to top the 880-yard relay, and then logged a 4:7.3 to win the 440-yard relay.

West Bloomfield's shuttle hurdle relay (Long, Andre Kingston, Matt McDermott and Rick Mickle) won with a time of 1:37.0, and Laker distance man Rex Fitzekam won the two-mile run with a 10:17.1 clocking.

West Bloomfield finished second in the long jump relay with the team of

Cox, Kingston and Gary Schroeder totaling 51.14. In the four-mile relay, West Bloomfield's crew (Gerard Grabowski, Pete Rosser, Chris Conley and Fitzekam) took second with a time of 19:54.0.

The Lakers recorded another second in the mile relay (Cox, Gary Schroeder, Bitner and Greg Schroeder) with a 3:40.0. West Bloomfield's Tom Montgomery teamed with Matt O'Mara, Karl Ederle and Tim Shook to finish

second in the two-mile relay with a time of 8:55.2.

In the shot put relay, West Bloomfield's Rick Mickle, Dan Kenwell and Bob Mickle took second with a 130-6 total. Long gave WB another second, going 15.9 in the 120-yard high hurdles.

"We did well and I was pleased with our finish," said West Bloomfield coach Lee Averill. "But those times were really slow because of the windy conditions. I mean that 47.3 in the 440 relay looks like a junior high relay."

call Stark at 646-1019 on Sunday evenings.

George Prosper of Detroit Country Day School will compile the girls' listing. Girls' coaches should call Prosper from 7:30-9 p.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays at 689-1911.

Track listings to appear soon

The area's best boys' and girls' track and field performances will appear every week in the sports sections of the Observer & Eccentric.

Bob Stark of Birmingham Brother Rice will compile the best times for the boys. High school coaches are asked to

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Southfield

Mercy's Michele Collins had an outstanding day at the recent Spartan Relays, taking third in the 880-yard run and sixth in the mile. Mercy finished 10th in the 23-school field.