

Dickerson steps up as new voice of Tigers

BY KEN ABRAMOWYK
PHOTO BY STEVE CAMPBELL

Just like nearly every other Michigan resident who is a Detroit Tigers fan, Dan Dickerson remembers growing up and listening to Ernie Harwell.

We all remember that crisp Georgian drawl blaring from a small transistor radio through a bedroom window on a sultry August evening, resonating that some of the Baltimore game off a neighbor's brick walls.

From the shores of Lake St. Clair to the campfires of the state parks, that distinct voice captured the heat of the pennant races of 1967, 1968 and 1972.

Now Dickerson, 44, of Clarkston finds himself in that same broadcasting chair, following Harwell's legacy, ready to step up to the plate and the microphone, after Harwell retired in October and Dickerson and Jim Price were named the official broadcasters for the Detroit Tigers.

Dickerson knows he's following a legend — certainly not replacing him. And he doesn't expect to. Dickerson said he doesn't feel any additional pressure. After all, he's worked with the Tigers for three years now.

"I feel there will be heightened interest," Dickerson said. "People will wonder what's this guy like and how will he handle that No. 1 seat."

LOVING THE GAME

Dickerson fell in love with baseball as a child growing up in Birmingham.

"I think it was a combination of the '67 season, and the pennant race that went down to the end," Dickerson said. "The Tigers lost the first game, then won the next nine. I was captivated with that team."

"Then one time my aunt let me play her son's Sintonomic baseball game. I played it for hours on end. You had great teams going against each other, like the '61 Tigers and the '61 Yankees."

"I think that had an impact, but it was nothing like going to a game. Once you were in that stadium, boy, you always wanted to go back to a game."

Dickerson graduated from Cranbrook Kingswood in 1976, then attended Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, where he got his first broadcasting gig as a college student there. Dickerson had a radio show at the college's station, WSLN.

"You could do anything you wanted," Dickerson said. "It was a station at a small school. If you had the spare time (from studies), you could come in and play music. I didn't see myself being a DJ forever, and so I did sports."

Soon, Dickerson broadcast play-by-play for the college's football games, then later basketball games. "I knew it was what I wanted to do," Dickerson said.

But get him back on the topic of baseball, and Dickerson's smile gets larger. He sits in what his wife, Lori Anne, calls his "baseball room." He has hundreds of baseball books on the shelves.

Baseball is his passion. Broadcasting is his career. And how the twain have met.

"I just thought the play-by-play would be so much fun, but I didn't know how hard it was to get there," Dickerson said. "It was kind of a circuitous path to get there."

Dickerson graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1980, then took a job at an all-news station in Grand Rapids at WMAX. Dickerson found himself out of work when that station switched to a gospel format so he wanted tables and bartending to pay the bills until he landed another job at WCTZ, another Grand Rapids station. That station had expanded to a 24-hour news format so Dickerson reported news and sports there.

In 1987, Dickerson broadcast play-by-play of high school basketball and football games for that station. "That (play-by-play) was probably in the back of my mind, and what I wanted to do was just get into sports," Dickerson said.

WORKING HIS WAY UP

At that time, Dickerson was engaged and would later marry Lori Anne Mathews, who worked as a reporter at the Detroit Free Press. She is now a journalism instructor at Michigan State University.

While they were engaged, former Detroit Free Press publisher David Lawrence asked Lori whether Dan had found a job in Detroit yet.

Lawrence wrote a letter of recommendation for Dickerson and in the summer of 1988, Dickerson landed a part-time news reporting job at WWJ. "He really opened a door to get me in there," Dickerson said. "There's no doubt about it." That job turned into a full-time

stint within three months, Dickerson said.

In February 2000, Dickerson's career with the Tigers began, working the broadcasts with Ernie Harwell and Jim Price. Just before Christmas, Dickerson and Price were named Tiger broadcasters.

Dickerson also will do a pregame show with Tigers manager Alan Trammell and, like Harwell, visit with players every day.

Dickerson doesn't think about that extra attention much now that he will solely handle the play-by-play this season, following Baseball Hall of Famer Harwell. "You can't because if you think about it, you get away from what you do best," Dickerson said. "I feel that this is what I was meant to do."

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Dan Dickerson and his wife, Lori, enjoy a moment with children Rachel and Justin.



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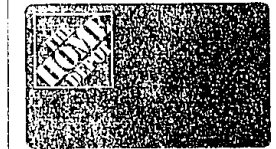
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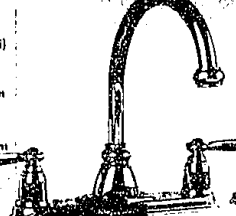
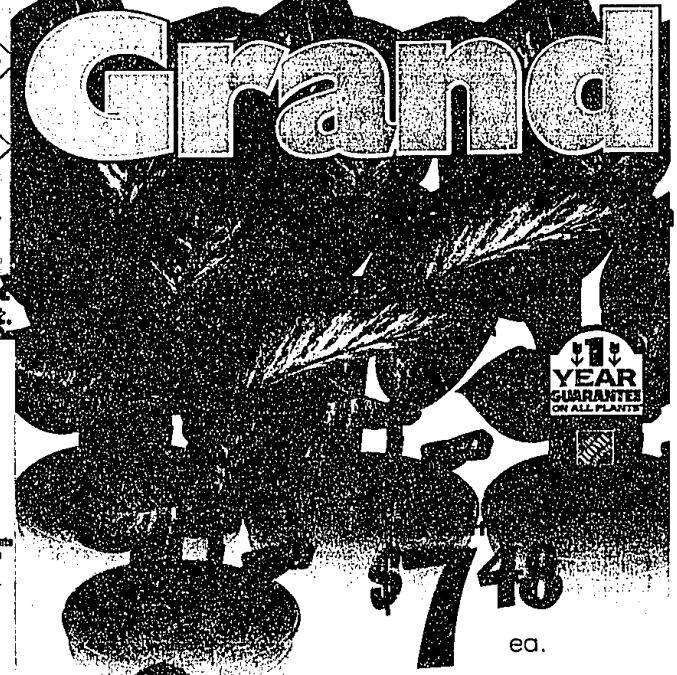
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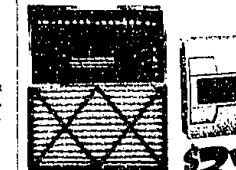
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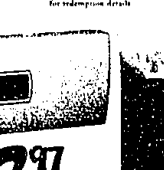
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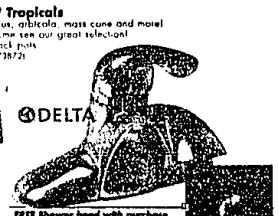
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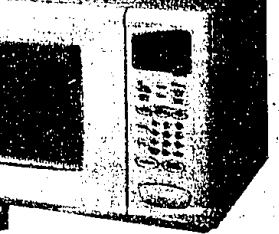
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