

Prep Sports Broadcaster at the Top of His Game

October 21, 2005

On a Saturday afternoon in October 1990, Dave Cox arrived at the Montgomery High School football field during the pregame warm-ups carrying a couple of tube cameras, some cheap lights and an old tape deck. Coach Jason Franci stood and watched.

"You really are going to try to do this," Franci said.

Fifteen years later, after completing nearly 800 broadcasts and receiving a Cable Ace Award in 1997 for the best cable sports coverage in the country, Cox is still at it. He scours Sonoma County for each week's best high school football, basketball or baseball matchup and, as announcer, producer and truck driver,

continues to bring his "Game of the Week" into the living rooms of roughly 95,000 local households that receive Comcast cable television.

"I didn't think he could pull it off," said Franci, now in his fourth decade coaching at Montgomery. "It's one of the greatest things that's ever happened. It has meant so much to the community."

"Dave is remarkable," said his color analyst Matt Collins. "He's doing it out of passion for the game. I'd imagine he's putting money out of his own pocket."

Cox, 45, worked in advertising and knew nothing about TV production before a college friend invited him to help with an experimental cable project in Santa Cruz in 1988. It was there that he began to envision a "game of the week" telecast in Santa Rosa, which would return him to his hometown and allow him to pursue his boyhood dream of play-by-play announcing. He pitched the idea unsuccessfully for several months, eventually

having to line up his own sponsors before Post-Newsweek Cable agreed to try one broadcast.

"That first game got a huge response," Cox said. "But for the next five years you always wondered when someone was going to pull the plug. The (cable) company has changed hands three times, and I've had to re-sell the idea every time. So many people have come and gone, and somehow I'm still there. It kind of blows my mind, actually."

Today, Cox covers games with a crew of 14, including a sideline reporter; the cameras and recorders are digital. Still, as in the beginning, obtaining basic electricity at high school games is an adventure, something Cox tries to keep a sense of humor about.

"One of the key things is where the breaker box is," Cox said. "Sometimes they lock them. So you try to figure out who has the breaker key and who is the back-up person with the key. Then you ask, 'OK, are you guys planning on plugging in anything other than the PA

system?' They say no, but then, invariably, the student body president will plug in the popcorn machine halfway through the first quarter and put us out of business.

"At Piner baseball games, we had to run cords all the way across the parking lot to the main building," he said. "By the time the power got to us, the voltage would drop. We would lose power, then get it back. One time someone didn't know we were plugged in because they were closing up the building over there, and they plugged us out.

"We've always had a problem at Newman football games," he said. "Last time, they promised us they'd take care of it with a generator. We get there, and there are these two little generators sitting over by Old Redwood Highway, the kind you start with pull strings like a lawn mower. We gassed them up and then I had to worry the whole game that they were going to run out of gas."

There can be other issues as well.

"We'll be getting ready to do our 'open,' " Cox said, referring to the brief segment before kickoff in which the announcers preview the game, "and they (the school's PA announcers) want to play the tape of the national anthem," Cox said. "We ask them if they can wait a minute and they say fine, but then right in the middle of the 'open' somebody panics and the anthem starts blasting...."

"The other big challenge in high school sports is getting information," he said. "They'll change numbers at the last second or bring a guy up from the (junior varsity) that they don't tell you about. So you'll get a name wrong a couple times and then you'll hear parents screaming at you from down below."

"Dave does a great job ad-libbing and making fine adjustments right on the spot," Collins said. "Last week, we had to delay the start of the game 10 minutes because the director in the truck had his own car break down on the way to the game."

Cox said his favorite broadcast partner was the late Anthony Robinson, with whom he worked in 1995-96. Robinson had been a high school basketball star in Richmond and then played at Sonoma State.

"He started the Get-Up Club, " Cox said. "When someone would slam-dunk, he'd put him in the club, and we'd replay the dunk with 'Get-Up Club' underneath the guy's name. We had more dunks those two years than probably in the last five years combined."

His favorite athlete to cover, Cox said, was probably Cardinal Newman quarterback Corey Willison.

"He was short and round," he said. "But when we did Serra vs. Newman in 1994, he beat Tom Brady," Cox said, referring to the New England Patriots' three-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback who in his younger days played for Serra High School in San Mateo.

There have been bittersweet moments, too. Four years ago, Cox and his crew were covering a

girls championship soccer game in the pouring rain at Elsie Allen. Cox was informed that a player named Megan Fitts had an ankle injury but would play the first few minutes of the game.

Cox sensed something more was going on. He found out that Fitts' father was at home suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease, and that this telecast was probably his last chance to watch her play. Later in the game, the girl's mother came up to Cox with tears streaming down her face. She had called her husband on a cell phone, and he had seen his daughter play soccer one more time.

As Cox acknowledges the 15th anniversary of the "Game of the Week," he concedes that he may not have quite the same energy he once did and that the broadcast may not be quite as fresh as it once was. He is not sure how long it will continue. For now, his goal remains simple.

"If people say high school sports is better because of Dave Cox televising the games," he said, "then I feel like I did something good."

-by Ted Gross

[Articles](#)