

# Walk on the mild side a memorable experience

Any young sportscaster has his idols and, having dabbled in play-by-play this past year for WXYC, I'm no different. Some of my current favorites are Brent Musburger, Bob Costas and Marv Albert, just to name a few.

But the one constant on my list has always been NBC's Dick Enberg, perhaps the best and most respected play-by-play man in the business. His trademark call, "Oh, my!" has cascaded from press boxes at such events as the World Series, the Super Bowl, the Final Four and Wimbledon. Always steady, painstakingly prepared and never offensive, Enberg has won a lapful of Emmies for his excellence.

So it was with great anticipation, even reverence, that I approached the Dean of Sportscasters last weekend over at Duke University. Enberg, whose brother Dennis teaches geography at N.C. Central University, was in Durham for the Duke Children's Classic — a great cause from which proceeds go to Duke Children's Hospital.

It was a stiflingly hot mid-May afternoon and Enberg had just come off the tennis courts after playing another celebrity-sponsor doubles match. Clutching a low-alcohol beer in one hand and the baby carriage containing his one-year old daughter, Emily, in the other, Enberg did not appear the ideal interview.

Remembering my mother's frequent reminder that "He who hesitates is lost," I approached him anyway and introduced myself as

## Mike Bernardino Out of Bounds

his next interviewer.

"Do you mind if we walk while we talk?" Enberg asked. "No, not at all," were the words I managed to force past the lump in my throat.

So off we went — me, little Emily and one of the greatest sportscasters ever to pull a headset on. Dodging celebrity-gawkers and curious children along the way, Enberg and I spoke about a variety of sports issues.

The first subject brought up was network-hopping, something which has recently occurred in massive numbers among big-name sportscasters. Enberg, though admittedly tempted many times by lucrative pacts dangled before him by other networks, has remained entrenched at NBC since 1975.

"It's kind of like moving furni-

ture," Enberg said of the bidding wars. "You think the house is all set and then you move one sofa and now you have to move all the other pieces, too." The fact he drew upon a household analogy was not surprising. Despite having to travel extensively, Enberg is a loyal family man whose wife, Barbara, and three-year-old daughter, Nicole, took shady refuge under a tent while we walked.

"The competition that people think exists between the networks is something I've never sensed," he continued. "I think the average fan really doesn't know the difference between the networks. If you were to quiz people and give them a 'Match the Networks With the Announcers' quiz, more people would be wrong than right."

The reassuring tone of Enberg's first answer eased my jitters, making it clear that he thought my questions mattered. The interview continued along quite nicely from that point.

Next, we talked about the recent addition of a fourth network, cable-channel ESPN, to the National Football League's television package. "I thought it would happen sooner and then when it didn't happen, I wondered if it ever would. It was an inevitability. It's great for the fans."

Almost in the same breath, though, Enberg attached a caveat to his support. "It's got to have some diluting effect, though. People have only so many hours in the day and so many hours in the week. Plus, there's only so much time even the most ardent sports fan should sit down and watch television.

"There are other important things in life and there should be other priorities, whether it be family or religion or work," Enberg said, inadvertently disclosing the secret to his longevity.

"It wasn't long ago when Billy Packer and Al McGuire and Enberg went on the air for the college basketball game of the

week and it was a national event. Heck, now that's just one of 30 or 40 games that are televised each week. Maybe selfishly I wish it was like it used to be."

As a few more would-be suitors for little Emily wandered on past, the discussion turned to Wimbledon, the London tennis tournament which Enberg has covered since 1979.

"It's still my favorite event of all the things I do," said Enberg, whose groundstrokes, though not exactly Breakfast at Wimbledon-esque, are as smooth as the owner's more famous voice. "It's not that I don't love baseball or football or basketball. But as an event, because it's two weeks long, you can really embrace and feel the event."

"And then there's the backdrop of London and the wonderful way in which the British treat it. It's really the premier sporting event for me as an announcer."

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