

Miller, Jack

Learning to live with unflattering nickname

Jack Miller leaned back, rolled his eyes and sighed heavily.

He was getting ready to discuss this 'Howdy Doody' thing that has dogged him since he first took over as sports director of CJBQ and play-by-play man for Belleville Bulls hockey games in 1982.

Miller and 'Howdy Doody' have been synonymous over the years, much to Miller's chagrin.

Being a professional broadcaster, a moniker like 'Howdy Doody' just doesn't sit well with him.

While Jack blames this columnist for getting the nickname into print, 'Howdy Doody' goes back to Jack's days as manager of Belleville Cornerstone Blues senior baseball team in the early 1980s.

Sitting in the spectator tent one day during an OBA senior A tournament at Rotary Park, several of the Blues' players were milling about as Jack, with rain pelting down, booted from his car, across the field to the press box.

"There he goes, Howdy Doody," one of the players remarked.

That, forever, changed the course of Jack's life in the fast lane as a broadcaster in Belleville.

"There are a lot worse things one can be called than 'Howdy Doody,'" Miller says. "I've never really understood the connection especially after seeing a picture of the puppet.

"Most of the time it comes from you," Miller said, pointing an accusing finger across the desk at BOM.

"It's something you put up with. What else are you going to do about it. But at least people are making the connection. It's a little additional attention. It might not be my favorite name, what the heck, it could be worse."

Jack is, well, one of those guys out there prone to practical jokes and teasing.

We recall the Bulls' season of 1985-86 when the Bulls beat out Kingston in Leyden Division semifinal playoff action.

Jack, along with then morning man Peter Thompson, cooked up a radio battle with Kingston play-by-play man Jim Gilchrist and CKWS morning man Lee Sterrey.

The losing radio personalities would have to journey to Belleville and proclaim the Bulls' prowess to a Belleville audience at Century Place and later that evening at a Bulls playoff game at the Sports Centre.

Jack was in his glory!

Strutting his stuff, a PA system was set up on the second floor balcony at Century Place and Jack was getting ready to parade Gilchrist and Sterrey in their Bulls uniforms.

But down below Jack noticed a lot of people glancing at pieces of paper being passed around.

RUBBER SOLE

with
Brian
O'Meara
Sports Editor



He was bewildered, scratched his freckles and grabbed one of the sheets.

There it was, another practical joke: Then Bulls GM-coach Larry Mavety characterized as pulling the strings of a Howdy Doody puppet.

That was just one of many practical jokes pulled on the Doodster over the years - there's also plenty of stories circulating CJBQ Radio as to just how many tapes of the Howdy Doody theme song exist (Jack tends to destroy each tape after use.)

Friend and broadcast color commentator Tom Gavey shakes his head when he hears or relates another Jack Miller story.

"He takes it too seriously," Gavey said of all the teasing and practical jokes. "If he didn't react the way he did when it first started, it would have all died out."

But Gavey is quick to point out that Miller's on-air talents are next to none and that's true. He's one of the best at what he does.

"It's like working with a pro, he's that good," Gavey says.

Former CJBQ morning man Peter Thompson, along with weekend morning man John Henderson, are also among those who have literally teased Jack to within an inch of his puppet strings.

Why?

"I guess it's just insane jealousy," Thompson joked last week. "You know you're going to get a rise out of him. To me it's kind of fun."

Jack's fair game, says Thompson.

"I guess he's one of the high profile people we've got around here (CJBQ) so..."

Thompson, who still 'gets' Jack despite the fact he now does the afternoon drive show (cracks about moving lips on TV, contact lenses, three star selections at the Bulls home games etc.), probably summed up the situation in the best possible light.

"Jack's a clever, well-organized guy and he wants everybody else around him to be the same."

To that extent, Miller has created some enemies over the years.



JACK MILLER

It's well known that Miller and the late Jack Devine, former CJBQ sports director, did not always see eye to eye.

Miller has also had his run-ins with Bulls' players and others associated with the club; fists were flying on at least one occasion.

It's just he's that TYPE of person; he's going to create enemies by just being himself sometimes.

But the Doodster has prevailed and to be sure, the media types here at The Intelligencer and at CJBQ-CIGL Radio wouldn't know what to do with our free time if Jack wasn't around.

Now, what can we do next.

Buffalo Bob and Clarabelle give us inspiration.

NOTES:...Jack's assistant at CJBQ is CARY TUCKER, who also doubles as PA announcer at Bulls games and patrols the outfield for Belleville's senior baseball team in the summer months.

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