



# Champion COMMUNITY Page

## SportsZone celebrates 200th show

**COGECO's community sports program has evolved into a popular, live call-in show**

By **STEVE LeBLANC**  
The Champion

**W**ho knew being pulled out of a high school geography class could be so educational?

Certainly not SportsZone Live's Mike Hancock — whose real schooling began when he first stepped in front of a camera about eight years ago.

At the time he was interested in a co-op placement, and was close to starting one with Metroland's Georgetown Independent. But fate — and the executive producer of the local community programming scene — had different ideas for the man who today is better known as 'The Hammer'.

"Dan Wagstaffe walked into my class and told me about his plan to do a sports show," recalled the now-widely recognizable host, who'll celebrate the program's 200th episode Monday, December 20. "I was 16 years old and basically given a show. It was pretty overwhelming."

Although he didn't come up with the initial concept for SportsZone, Mr. Hancock has been without question the driving force behind the program's evolution. He learned the ropes and took it from a crude half-hour taped show to its 1993 debut as an hour-long, live call-in program and finally to its current status as the popular flagship of COGECO 14's community programming line-up.

The 24-year-old said SportsZone Live -- which is now watched by a few thousand cable subscribers in Milton and Halton Hills every Monday at 8 p.m. -- has survived and flourished for a couple of reasons. One, because he's chosen to focus on the local scene rather than professional sports. And two, because he was able to find an equally entertaining and insightful co-host.

### Freestone comes on board

That piece of the puzzle came in the form of fellow sports enthusiast Pat Freestone, 31 — who was already doing movie reviews for the community station and was invited to fill in on the show one Monday in February, 1995.

"I had flipped by the show a few times but honestly didn't have much interest in it," admitted the colour man. "It felt like an in-crowd show, where the same people phoned in every week."

But it wasn't that long before the show's appeal expanded, thanks to the new partnership — which afforded for more continuity and better bantering on camera.

Said Mr. Hancock, "There were a couple of other co-hosts but there were always problems with commitment and such. What Pat did was give the show another strong presence, in terms of commitment and personality. It's been pure magic ever since."

Since their on-air union, the two have added a number of elements to the show including highlights from junior hockey and lacrosse games plus other bells and whistles like standings and schedules.



Photo by STEVE LeBLANC

Hosts Mike Hancock (left) and Pat Freestone talk shop on SportsZone Live, which will celebrate its 200th episode Monday.

And prizes for the weekly trivia contest get better each year.

But both agree that what keeps viewers tuned in is their commitment to local sports coverage — something that many similar shows at the community level tend to ignore.

"Who really cares what we have to say about the Blues Jays or Leafs?" remarked Mr. Freestone, who describes himself as a know-it-all Don Cherry-type to Mr. Hancock's straight man Ron MacLean. "We're authorities on the local sports issues, not national. If you want that, you should be tuning in to The Fan or something."

### Work behind the scenes

SportsZone Live's hosts stress that a lot more work goes into the show than just the one hour fans see each week. A big chunk of their respective weekends is devoted to watching junior hockey or lacrosse games as well as interviewing coaches and players — while Mr. Hancock, now a full-time paid employee of COGECO 14, does an additional four hours of prep work each Monday.

Not that either are complaining.

Both have a huge appreciation for local sports, that came even before the show began, and are proud of the ongoing validation they've received from fans across north Halton.

"I think that's a testament to the show's evolution," said Mr. Freestone. "We still get a lot of great feedback from people we've never met before. But I'm still surprised more people don't take advantage of the show. Where else can you just call up and have

your say in a local forum?"

Mr. Hancock — who's undertaken a variety of sports broadcasting assignments over the years and still has aspirations of taking his talents to the national front — said SportsZone Live has been particularly poignant for fans in recent years, with major events like the Milton Merchants winning the provincial championship and last week's termination of Georgetown Raider coach Jay Anderson.

"The firing stirred a lot of people up. It just goes to show how passionate people are about their local sports," he said.

### Feet soaked

Mr. Hancock said he has thoroughly enjoyed the experiences he's had — and subsequent relationships he's forged — through SportsZone Live.

"It's a great learning ground for anyone hoping to get into broadcasting," he said. "It's a great place to get your feet wet, and right now my feet are completely soaked."

Added Mr. Freestone, "We've really gotten to do a lot of cool stuff. How many people can say they get to host their own television show? It's fun."

But while SportsZone Live's hosts are always talkative on and off air, both are staying rather tight-lipped about the festivities in store for next week's milestone episode.

"All I can say is that we'll have some good prizes and it'll be fun," said Mr. Hancock. "You'll just have to tune in."

**COGECO**  
CABLE SOLUTIONS

...taking you there

[www.cogeco.ca](http://www.cogeco.ca)

Acton  
21 Main Street North,  
Acton, ON L7J 1V9  
519-853-1270, or 853-4700

### COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — December 14th- December 20th, 1999

Tuesday, December 14th	Wednesday, December 15th	Thursday, December 16th	Sunday, December 19th	Monday, December 20th
10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore	4pm, 5pm, 6:30pm Plugged In! - Week in Review	10am, 11am, 12pm Plugged In! Encore
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!	5:30pm, 6:30pm, 7:30pm Plugged In!	4:30pm The Local Scene	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm Plugged In!
6:00pm Seniors Showcase	6:00pm Cable in the Classroom	6:00pm The Local Scene	5:30pm Seniors Showcase	6:00pm We Will Remember Them
7:00pm Money Week	7:00pm Swap Talk - Live	7:00pm The issue is...	6:30pm Acton Santa Claus Parade	7:00pm Living On the Edge
8:00pm Halton Hills Council- Dec 6th	8:00pm Milton Council - Dec 13th	8:00pm Halton Region Council- Dec. 8th		8:00pm SportsZONE Live

Feature this week: "The Rockwood Christmas Parade of Lights - Sunday, 6:30 pm"