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NCAA tournament: Drake grad Friedman calls Winthrop's shot

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THE EXCITABLE VOICE of Dave Friedman was counting down the final seconds of Winthrop University's upset win in the championship game of the Big South Conference tournament two weeks ago when the Eagles' radio play-by-play announcer out of Drake High let loose.

"And the dynasty is STILL ALIVE!" Friedman screamed.

It was Winthrop's eighth conference title in the past 10 years but it was the first time Friedman's call had such far-reaching impact. CBS TV and ESPN radio picked it up and aired it nationally. Friedman has had his one shining moment in March Madness.

"It's awesome," said the red-headed Friedman, who will call Winthrop's NCAA tournament game in Denver against Washington State on Thursday. "I am a college basketball nut."

For Friedman, the NCAA tournament has been his calling. In 2003, while a broadcast journalism and political science major at Syracuse University, Friedman was on the college radio station announcing the Orange's national championship game victory over Kansas in New Orleans with his father, Bruce, in attendance. Last year, in his first season of broadcasting Winthrop games, Friedman provided the play-by-play of the Eagles' stunning first-round upset of Notre Dame with his dad sitting courtside with him.

In between those games, Friedman's broadcasting career sounds like a Cinderella story out of nowhere. After college, Friedman had job opportunities in Albany, N.Y., Evansville, Ind., and Charlotte, N.C., which is where he decided to accept a position as the No. 2 baseball announcer for the Triple-A Charlotte Knights in the summer. In the fall, he drove up to Burlington, Vt., to follow college friend Chris Wojcik, who was announcing University of Vermont men's basketball games. Friedman was hired to announce women's games for the Catamounts.

Friedman then started going back and forth between Burlington and Hickory, N.C., where he wound up doing play-by-play for the Single-A minor league baseball team there. He went from covering Catamounts to covering Crawdads, the nickname of Hickory's team.

Of course, Friedman was traveling from one state and one sport to another in order to make ends meet. When he was doing football games for Middlebury College in Vermont, Friedman got a speeding ticket during a 300-mile drive to call a game at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, and spent the whole season trying to earn enough money to pay for the violation.

Friedman eventually became the play-by-play announcer for women's basketball at Radford University in Virginia. But, when the job to broadcast men's basketball at Winthrop became available, Friedman applied.

"I could have got a job anywhere and nowhere," Friedman said. "I was fortunate to come into a place which had a winning tradition and winning is all that they tolerate. I kind of hit the jackpot."

It apparently didn't come as a great surprise to Friedman's first-grade teacher at Brookside Elementary

in San Anselmo, Michael Honeycutt. When Honeycutt ran into Friedman's mother, Joanne, he asked what Dave was doing. Joanne explained that Dave was a sports announcer on radio.

"In first grade, most kids want to grow up to be teachers or policemen or firefighters or astronauts. He wanted to be a sportscaster. He'd actually did imitations in class," said Honeycutt, who now teaches at Wade Thomas Elementary School in San Anselmo. "He's an amazing guy. It's impressive someone would hold onto a dream like that and carry it over."

Friedman's dream was evident when he and his father would sit down and watch football games on Sundays when Friedman was 10 years old.

"He would announce the games, which drove me nuts," Bruce Friedman said. "We wanted to listen to the announcers but couldn't do both."

The late Bill King and Hank Greenwald were Friedman's childhood heroes. For a fourth-grade report on a state in the union, Friedman picked New York and wrote a letter to Syracuse because that's where Greenwald went to college. In fifth grade, Friedman interviewed Channel 5's Wayne Walker, KCBS's Hal Ramey and KNBR's Bob Fitzgerald and Ralph Barbieri for a school research paper.

At Drake, Friedman started out as the public-address announcer for Pirates freshman football games but, by the time he was a sophomore, he was doing varsity football and basketball games and ultimately the MCAL basketball tournament at Redwood High. As a junior, Friedman hosted a TV sports show on Marin community access cable. In the meantime, he was attending A's and Giants games with a cassette recorder to tape his own play-by-play. He'd come home, lie on his bedroom floor and listen to his own re-broadcast.

"He was really weird," Joanne Friedman said. "He was his own kid."

But the kid grew up and didn't change his life's goal. Now his father listens to his 27-year-old son's broadcasts on the Internet back East when he's at work as an attorney in San Francisco and Friedman's grandparents are tuning in, too. Esther and Sheldon Friedman of Greenbrae know the Web site, and sometimes maternal grandparents Mildred and Leonard Rothschild, who do not have a personal computer, will ask them to hold the telephone receiver to their computer.

"That's my grandparents. They are nutty," Friedman said.

Tim Koblenz, a friend from San Anselmo, will attend Thursday's game to watch and listen to the Winthrop play-by-play announcer take another step in his quest to enter the Big Dance of sports broadcasting, getting a big-time job in a big-time sport away from Rock Hill, S.C.

"It's just amazing anyone would follow their passion that far," Joanne Friedman said. "But he's doing what he wanted to do."

Friedman is calling his own shots. Loud and clear.