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Winthrop basketball radio man's preparation is uniquely his

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Dave Friedman is in his spot.

It's past midnight and Winthrop's 10-year men's basketball play-by-play announcer is home on the floor in front of his couch wearing pajama bottoms and wrapped in a white blanket. A random college basketball game is playing on the 55-inch widescreen TV. His laptop and a pile of papers sit on the coffee table before him. He's immersed in preparation for the upcoming game against High Point.

In Friedman's words, he's in his spot.

'I do it for me'

The following afternoon, Friedman is in the only other spot in the world where he may feel more comfortable, courtside calling Winthrop basketball.

He's armed with the three resources that inform every game: a situational stat sheet, a chart on each team and a sheet of yellow pad paper used to track the game as it happens. It's a dizzying spread of information, carefully put together over the course of the season and in all-night cram sessions.

"What I do, I do it for me," he said. "If something quirky comes up it'll bother me if I don't have the answer to it."

THERE PROBABLY AREN'T FIVE BROADCASTERS IN AMERICA THAT OUTWORK HIM.

Mike Pacheco, on his Winthrop basketball radio partner Dave Friedman.

Not only does he tend to stay up late, teasing nuggets of information out of game notes, but he also regularly attends Winthrop practices, when he isn't teaching a sports journalism class, and watches film with the team -- and on his own. It usually adds up to about 10 to 12 hours of work before each game, not counting the prep work that happens before the season starts.

"His preparation, that's his foundation," said Mike Pacheco, who has partnered with Friedman, also for 10 years. "And you've heard his broadcast, he couldn't be that intense without that foundation of knowledge."

Nowhere are the preparation and effort more evident than the game charts.

Printed information in tiny fonts co-mingles with Friedman's miniscule, multi-colored handwriting to create a mosaic that when held a couple feet from a person's face is almost illegible. But Friedman's chart is purposefully assembled, with certain portions containing the same information every game and different colored writing suggesting different categories of stats and background information. Friedman can look at the chart and see the color and location of a factoid and recall what it is, almost without reading it.

As he said, the act of making the chart is almost more important than having it.

Infinite possibility

Friedman and Pacheco described radio as “theater of the mind.” Wrapped in his white blanket late on a Friday night in January, Friedman explained.

“If we miss a key detail, the listener was let down,” he said, muting his TV to prove the point. Eyes closed without the crutch of visuals, there was only silence.

Friedman and his wife, Nicole, an airline pilot, love traveling. Photos that they snapped on trips around the world adorn the walls of their townhouse. Traveling and broadcasting share a commonality, infinite possibility. Friedman deeply enjoys painting the aural picture of a basketball game: “the idea that I can go to basketball practice, I can talk to the coach, see the plays, talk to the players and then you can put it together in some sort of entertaining and informative way.”

I JUST LOVE BASKETBALL, I JUST LIKE TALKING ABOUT BASKETBALL.

Dave Friedman

Friedman’s career travels sanded and polished his skills.

After graduating from Syracuse University’s prestigious Newhouse Broadcasting School, broadcasting led him from Vermont to the foothills of North Carolina, to Radford University and the Charlotte Knights, calling baseball and basketball in stadiums and gyms all along the east coast.

Working unpaid with Knights broadcaster Matt Swierad for several summers was arguably Friedman’s most important career development. Laid back and generally calmer, Swierad helped temper Friedman’s on-air energy while still encouraging his intense preparation.

“In a good way he was an acquired taste,” Swierad said. “He came across, not pushy, but he was very aggressive and knew what he wanted to do. He was very determined and was gonna outwork everybody.”

A radio voice

The 36-year-old California native has a distinctly nasal voice that stands out among sports broadcasters.

“I actually think that’s kind of a strength of his,” Pacheco said. “Twenty years ago if you didn’t have that big Midwest sound it was harder for you to get a job. Now I think some of those barriers are breaking down. Some of it has to do with the fact that a lot of the games are now on ESPN3 and schools are streaming. There are more opportunities.”

Friedman said he doesn’t have a “radio voice.” His voice will sound the same when he’s drinking a beer after the game. But many, including Winthrop sports information director Jack Frost, like his California-New York vocal blend.

“There are so many out there now that are clones that try to sound like Jim Nantz,” Frost said. “So that was unique too that he had a very distinct delivery and voice and also that he was very well prepared and excitable.”

Excitable is an apt adjective. Friedman narrates the action with an uncommon vigor, especially when events heat up. He stands and puts a hand on Pacheco’s shoulder like an Evangelical preacher healing a follower. His voice rises and arches, emphasizing key thoughts and hammering home pivotal plays.

That passion is what landed him the Winthrop job in the summer of 2006. The school had an opening and Friedman sent Frost a tape from a Radford women's basketball game.

"It was like a last-second 3-pointer that won the game for Radford," Frost said. "That's what sold me on Dave because if I could get excited listening to this, I know Dave could get other people excited."

TO THIS DAY, HE'S STILL THAT WAY, TENDS TO OUTWORK EVERYBODY. AND THAT'S WHY HE'S STILL DOING IT AND BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS HE'S BEEN, AND AT SOME POINT IS GONNA GET A CHANCE TO BE SOME PLACE ELSE AT A HIGHER LEVEL IF HE CHOOSES TO BE.

Charlotte Knights radio voice Matt Swierad, on Winthrop's Dave Friedman

Back in his spot

It was 2 a.m. when a reporter groggily left Friedman's southwest Charlotte home, which was okay with Friedman. He was about to get down to serious work.

He grew up in the Bay Area and wanted to be a Major League Baseball play-by-play announcer from a very early age. He did a fifth grade project on sports announcing and interviewed a number of prominent sports broadcasters around San Francisco and Oakland. Friedman's idol growing up was Bill King, who, as the play-by-play man for the A's, Raiders and Warriors, was one of the few radio men in the country to ever call three major pro sports.

Friedman relishes what might seem like busy work, what might seem like long hours to the 9-to-5 crowd. He religiously listens to replays of his broadcasts, not because he enjoys the sound of his voice but because he wants to continually improve. Calling live sports is all he ever wanted to do and he's not going to sell it short.

As the reporter drove home, calculating how many hours of sleep would be possible before the following day's Winthrop home game, Friedman, burrowed in his spot, plowed through the rest of the prep work.

"I'll wake up tomorrow and I'll be excited," he said. "I love doing this and it makes me happy."