

## Big Comeback at Mizzou

On [April 15th](#) (2008) I posted about how MU Athletic Director, Dave Hart, Sr., canceled our existing radio contract and rebid. We lost to a St. Louis company, SNI, and were out for two years: '78--'80. During the interval we began planning how we would retake MU when there was a rebid. Hart made it clear the winner would have to come up with lots of cash and a strong promotional plan. Hart liked the St. Louis guys: Jim Baaken, a kicker for the St. Louis Football Cardinals and Greg Maracek, a writer for the St. Louis Suburban Newspapers. The bid documents seemed slanted to favor them. For one thing, the successful bidder was required to name an official "flagship" station just like in '78 when we lost. We all knew the power of KMOX, the "voice of St. Louis" and whoever named them as flagship was the likely winner. SNI had a verbal agreement from KMOX's legendary manager, Robert Hyland, that SNI could use KMOX in their bid document. I suspected that whoever won the financial agreement could have Hyland's KMOX.

The public bid opening was a hum-dinger. There we were in a tiny room before a bespeckled purchasing clerk: SNI, and Learfield. The clerk opened and read SNI's proposal and announced both their monetary bid and their flagship: KMOX. Ours was next. Like two years before, we'd put more money on the table than SNI, but this time, instead of naming a station that Hart didn't want, we left the flagship question blank. It was either the clerk or Maracek who quickly asked about the flagship and I responded: "whoever the university chooses -- most likely KMOX." Maracek cried "foul"! He was both angry and dumbfounded. As soon as possible after the opening was concluded, I got Hyland on the telephone and reported: "Hey, Bob, we won; you and I... we just won the rights to the MU bidding! He was pleased. You see, Hyland didn't care a hoot about who had the rights -- all he wanted was to carry the games on his station.

Of all my professional career, this was the most exciting victory of any. The five-year deal was valued at just over six million; \$1,200,000 in cash. Little did I know then, but this cemented what has become a continuous 27-year deal with MU. It likely was singularly responsible for our entry into the sports business. It would have been difficult for us to grow and prosper if we didn't own the rights to the University of Missouri only 30 miles up the road; in our formative years, it was crucial. The picture above is the signing ceremony: me and Dave Hart.



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Now that we had promised MU some \$201,000 in cash and much more in non-cash promotion, new demands were made of our affiliate radio stations including higher rights fees and increased network commercial inventory. We asked stations for more pre and post game programming and required clearance of basketball broadcasts.

Disgruntlement among some radio managers led to a private meeting during the 1981 Missouri Broadcaster's Association convention in Branson. Member, Jerrell Shepherd, owner of KWIX, Moberly, told me he was going to ask the Association to ask the University to offer all the games free to each and every Missouri radio station. Shepherd based his argument on a belief that electronic media should be allowed the same free access to the games as printed media. Also, he noted, the University was a public, taxpayer-supported, institution and thus should offer the broadcasts free to all.

I was excluded from this special closed meeting until the very end when several friendly broadcasters persuaded the others to allow me to make my case. I explained how my company had taken the risk; how it was up to us to sell sufficient advertising to pay the increased rights fee. I told them the financial burden wasn't being transferred to them and that all we wanted was an equal number of commercial availabilities. And, I explained, we could get "a lot more inventory in each of these broadcasts" which benefited all of us.

The moment of truth came when Shepherd finished making an impassioned appeal to his fellow broadcasters. He told them that he and his managers (Shepherd owned four or five Missouri stations at the time) were going to stand and walk out and as a show of support he'd like the rest of the broadcasters to follow them. I held my breath. None moved. Shepherd and his managers were alone on the sidewalk outside. That was a huge turning point in MU broadcast history, because if Shepherd had prevailed and the MBA had held out, there might not be a Mizzou Sports Network as we know it.

As an aside, Shepherd and I remained friends and all of his stations became affiliates that year. Today our contract arrangement with our affiliates takes into account a number of factors -- market size for example-- but we've tried our best not to gouge our loyal affiliates.

*July 23, 2008*