



## Leonard Shapiro

Sports Columnist

### Catching Up With Former Sportscaster Steve Bassett

By Leonard Shapiro  
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Those of a certain middle age may well remember Steve Bassett as a dapper Washington sportscaster in the mid-1970s who appeared regularly from Monday through Friday at 6 and 11 to deliver a nightly sports report on Channel 7.

He was a clean cut, natty dresser with a full head of properly coiffed hair and a perfectly pitched voice that also served him well calling football and basketball games as the television play-by-play man for the University of Maryland and, a few years later, handling college basketball for NBC Sports.

If you recall him from back in the day, you likely wouldn't recognize him these days, mostly because his dome has that shaved-clean, Charles Barkley look and his once peach-fuzz, boyish face is now accessorized with a gray goatee and mustache to match. But the golden-throated voice has hardly changed a bit, and Bassett is still using it occasionally as a broadcaster, as a businessman and far more frequently as a motivational speaker with countless appearances before very large groups.

These days, he's promoting his latest one-hour presentation "Did I Ever Tell You About The Time?" based on many of his interesting experiences as a sportscaster, including a chance encounter with Muhammad Ali, covering Hank Aaron's chase of Babe Ruth's home run record and being there when Sugar Ray Leonard came back to town after winning a boxing gold medal in the 1976 Montreal Olympics, and his seven keys to success in business and life.



I've seen video excerpts from the presentation and it really is quite entertaining and rather inspirational. But for purposes of this column, I must admit that I was far more interested in speaking with Bassett about why he gave up such a seemingly promising broadcasting career to head in such a diametrically opposite direction out of fun and games and into the business sector.

One answer is simple enough. Airplanes.

Not that Bassett, 58, a Washington area native and Vietnam veteran, had any sort of fear of flying. In fact it was quite the opposite.

He had started taking flying lessons about the same time he began doing television in the local market and, in 1978, earned his pilot's license. At the time, he and his wife had a two-year-old and he was working in the St. Louis market, also doing play-by-play of University of Missouri football games. He

loved the on-air part of the business, but hated the occupational hazard of having to constantly move his family around the country in pursuit of a bigger, better job.

That's what happened in Washington. He and many other sportscasters around town had been forced to go up against the local sports broadcasting juggernaut known as Warner Wolf. The man who pioneered the use of videotape long before ESPN was ever on the air, Wolf was the innovative lead sportscaster for Channel 9, which also fielded by the far the most popular and highest rated news shows in town.

General Managers and news directors at the other three Washington television stations were constantly shuffling bodies in and out trying to compete, but Channel 9, with Gordon Peterson and the late, great Max Robinson as the lead anchors, dominated the market, with everyone else mostly an afterthought.

Bassett, among many others, could see his future very clearly at Channel 7, because he knew there wasn't much of a long-term future on local TV, at least not then with Channel 9 clearly the people's choice. That's when he decided to take an offer from a Baltimore station to be the weekend man and also work for NBC Sports doing college basketball play-by-play.

Not long after that, a St. Louis station came calling, and he moved to the Midwest for several years, until his passion for flying eventually also became his life's work.

In 1980, he was recruited by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the largest aviation organization in the world, to work in media relations, a position that also got him back to the Washington area. The job eventually branched out to include communications, government relations and lobbying at the state and national levels. Bassett stayed for 11 years, rising to senior vice president until he decided to open his own business in 1990, doing much of the same work for corporate clients in the aviation business.

He also was trained by the National Transportation Safety Board in aviation accident investigations, and today uses that knowledge to help airlines and other companies in the industry with their disaster response policies.

"There really was no one out there doing the kind of comprehensive aviation disaster response planning and training that I thought needed to be done," he said in a recent interview. "We help companies get through the process, prepare them for what's going to happen, how to deal with situations that inevitably will come up. It's never easy, but crisis management and disaster response planning is something that responsible companies in all industries must do."

Bassett now runs his business, The Communications Workshop, LLC, out of North Laurel and he's also managed to keep his hand in broadcasting over the last 15 years, doing play-by-play of high school football and basketball games in Howard County on local cable stations and handling play-by-play for telecasts of the DC Divas games.

He's occasionally been contacted in recent years about possibly getting back in the local sportscasting business, but it's always been thanks, but no thanks.

"I'm happy with the decision I made when I first decided to change careers," he said. "I wouldn't want to be back in that grind again. It's a different world on television today, maybe not as cutthroat as it was back when I was doing it, but stations don't give their sports people very much time on the air, maybe 2 ½ minutes to cram it all in. That's just not for me. I love what I'm doing right now, couldn't be happier."

(WP)