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Top Athlete
Stevie Johnston

Still in the Game

During his 53 years in broadcasting, Joe Cullinane has covered a lot of ground. He's rubbed elbows with some of the biggest names in sports: boxer Jack Dempsey, Denver's own John Elway, basketball's Magic Johnson and Dr. J, and even hockey legend Wayne Gretzky. The list of baseball greats he's interviewed is even more impressive: Joe DiMaggio, Jackie Robinson, Mickey Mantle, Pee-Wee Reese, and Sammy Sosa.

Cullinane came to Denver in 1975 after spending 13 years as the radio play-by-play announcer for New York state's Rochester Red Wings (the AAA farm team for the Baltimore Orioles). He'd heard rumblings that Denver might get a major-league baseball franchise. Baseball being his

tween batters," he explains. "The true test of a play-by-play announcer is not his play-by-play description, but what he has to say when the action has slowed down." The exciting sports-writing of the '30s - an art form Cullinane sees as transformed by television - is something he savored in his hometown of Chicago.

In 1937, when Cullinane was just 14, he won a junior sportswriting contest for *The Chicago Times*. His prize was the chance to cover a dream game between the Chicago White Sox and the New York Yankees and watch legendary players DiMaggio and Lou Gehrig.

Following a five-year tour in the Army, Cullinane was ready to pursue a career in journalism. He flipped through the phone book and

Joe Cullinane

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great love, he chose to make the move. "I wanted to be in a place that would eventually get big-league baseball," he says, "and I liked the area."

In Denver, Cullinane began as the play-by-play announcer on radio station KOA for the Denver Bears minor-league baseball team. He called the plays for nearly 10 years, two of which he spent working alongside current Rockies announcer Jeff Kingery. The National Hockey League's former Colorado Rockies also hired Cullinane as its public-address announcer for six years.

In 1998, he broadcast weekly nostalgic baseball interviews on KTLK with Irv Brown and Joe Williams. The radio interviews included replays of some of Cullinane's previous broadcasts with DiMaggio and other baseball legends.

Cullinane's experience is hard-won, with years of auditions and rejections along the way. He often reflects on a time in 1968 when he tried out as an announcer for the Baltimore Orioles. "I'll never forget that all-alone feeling," he says. "Twenty-one years in the business, and this is going to be the big chance." But it wasn't to be his big-league shot.

The old-school, dramatic quality of Cullinane's stories reveals a life spent mostly in radio broadcasting. "You have to be an entertainer because there's a lot of time to fill between outs and be-

came across the Columbia School of Broadcasting. Cullinane immediately signed up, completed the courses, and has never looked back.

Cullinane's career memories serve as the core of speeches he delivers in Colorado retirement communities, recreation centers, churches, service clubs, and libraries. His experiences are also part of his yet-to-be-published book, *Sportscasting: a Roller Coaster Ride*. Told through anecdotes, the book illustrates Cullinane's determination to stay in sportscasting despite its ups and downs.

Even today, at 76, Cullinane continues to develop his career. During baseball season, he gives periodic Rockies reports to the Sports Network in Philadelphia. He is also seeking a publisher for his book and a sponsor for a radio show on KEZW this season, which will be a continuation of last summer's 4:30 p.m. spot featuring interviews with Rockies players, broadcasters, and other sports icons.

Marketing his talents without rest, Cullinane believes he is blessed with the same talent and enthusiasm he had 40 years ago. "I've never retired," he says. "I dismiss my age. I bring the experience and the voice." - *Kindle Fahlenkamp*

To find out more about Cullinane's book, radio show, or lectures, contact him at 303-758-5026.



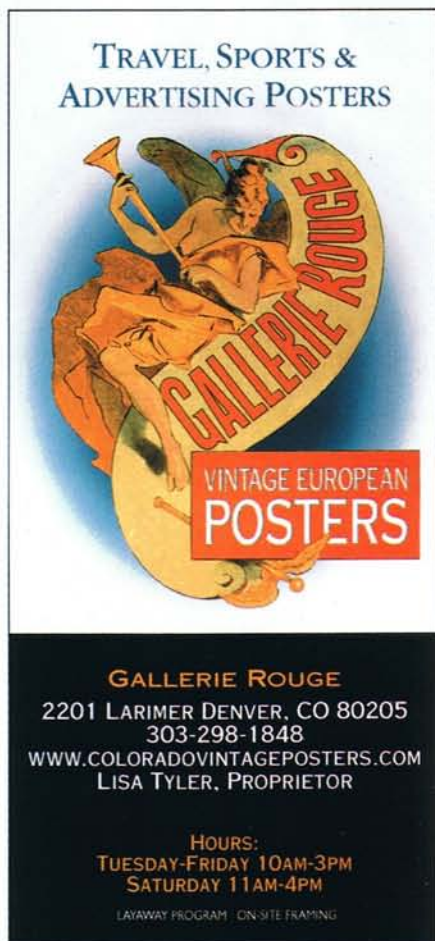
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