

# A Booth-Full of Broadcasters

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Ample evidence exists of the compelling influence that broadcasters such as Red Barber, Gordon McLendon, and Harry Carry. Moreover, the financial importance of television has been underscored by Commissioner Peter Ueberroth who recently noted: "The national TV contracts are more than half our revenue, and we have to design our product to (accomodate) that . . ." Despite its influence and importance, broadcasting has been a neglected aspect of baseball's history until the 1980s. Fortunately this decade has produced a variety of works which create a base for drawing sharper insights on the craft of baseball broadcasting in particular and sportscasting in general.

Leading the way has been Curt Smith's *Voices of the Game* a valuable survey with material from numerous interviews with announcers, sportswriters, broadcast executives and baseball officials. Smith's overview has been augmented by David Voigt's third volume and important reference contributions such as David Porter's *Biographical Dictionary of American Sport* and Peter Winhausen's *North American Sports Encyclopedia*. Moreover, the 1980s have produced a host of works by broadcasters including Jack Brickhaus, Ernie Harwell, Lindsey Nelson, Ralph Kiner, Tim McCarver, and additional books by Red Barber and Howard Cosell. Also, parts of the works of Bob Uecker, Ron Luciano, and Bowie Kuhn have offered significant information, while forthcoming volumes by Harry Caray, Joe Garagiola and ABC executive Jim Spence promise still more insights.

This body of work indicates the time is opportune to suggest future questions for investigation. First, why did the voice of the South sound so sweet in New York? The three dominant figures in in radio and television baseball coverage in Gotham have been Alabaman Mel Allen, Mississippi born, Florida reared, and Alabama educated Walter Lanier Barber, and Tennessee's Lindsey Nelson. Students examining this southern sports appeal might wish to compare it with the parallel dominance of Southern voices in newscasting, exercised by North Carolinian David Brinkley, Virginia Howard K. Smith, and Texan Dan Rather.

A second question concerns why regular season network baseball has had so many problems. Curt Smith has offered some answers: namely the lack of extensive promotion of baseball by the networks and executive problems. Other writers have contrasted the network broadcasters unfavorably with team announcers, noting that local crews can assume more interest and knowledge of the game from their listeners, than can a network voice who must cater to the lowest common denominator of his audience. Yet, other elements such as an over emphasis on the game between pitcher catcher and hitter to the detriment of stories, humor, and irreverent diversion and tendency of network broadcasters to preach may have added to network problems as well.