Tell a Story

- Three basic keys of calling a game: **description, analysis and storytelling**
  - **Description**: calling the immediate action (play-by-play)
    - Location, game action, time, score, situation, sights & sounds
  - **Analysis**: explaining why/how things are happening in the game (color)
    - Examining the action, evaluating the numbers, trends
  - **Storytelling**: broadcast your game as though you are telling a story (both)
    - Importance, key players/coaches, stats, background info, storylines

- Especially without significant background information and stats, description, analysis and storytelling are the true mark of a good broadcaster
- Want to make people feel as though they are a part of the game
- New listeners want to be brought up to speed on what is happening relatively quickly

Constants

- Basics & building blocks that should be followed for every broadcast
- **Description** (duties of play-by-play):
  - Location
    - Where is the ball? Who has it?
    - Horizontal and vertical reference points
  - Game action
    - Describe what is happening in the game right now
    - Player with the ball
    - Movements
  - Time
    - How much time is left
  - Score
    - What is the score of the game
  - Situation
    - What is the current situation the teams are in
    - Ex) Trailing by 2, leading by 10, 2 minute offense, mounting a comeback, etc.
  - Sights & sounds
    - Player/coach/fan emotions, behaviors
    - Atmosphere & environment
- **Analysis** (duties of color):
  - Examining the Action
    - How/why did the previous play happen? Details?
    - How are the teams currently playing?
    - Give constant, in-depth analysis to offer the viewers additional insight into the action
  - Evaluating the Numbers
    - What do the stats mean?
    - How do they show how the game has been played?
What needs to change for each team?

- **Trends**
  - How has the game-play shifted?
  - Why are the teams playing the way they are, how does that contrast to previous points in the game?
  - What has each team done (or not done) up until now?
  - Relevant seasonal trends (ex: Stags offense has been hitting at 45% from beyond the 3-pt line so far this year but today they are only 5 for 21)

**Storytelling** (duties of both):

- **Storylines**
  - Relevant and important news, stories, trends to follow in the game
  - How does what happened in the game so far compare with pregame storylines?
  - What has developed in the game to become a new storyline?

- **Importance**
  - Why does this game matter? What is at stake?
  - What does it mean to your team if they win or lose?
  - Why is this possession/at-bat/play important?

- **Key Players/Coaches**
  - Who is important?
  - Develop characters in your storytelling of the game
  - Identify these players, develop new characters and express the impact they make

- **Stats**
  - Give past and live stats (team/individual) and information to support the game
  - Use stats that are relevant to the situation

- **Background info**
  - Relevant past information on the teams/players/coaches
  - More than just stats – information the listener might not already know

- **Re-setting**
  - Give recaps of how the game got to its current point or of significant changes in scoring
  - Tell the listener what happened and why
  - Significant plays/stats/storylines
  - Key injuries?
  - People tune in and out. It helps to re-set the game so you keep the audience engaged and up-to-date

**Stay Cool**

- Important not to overstate the importance of any single play
- Games are long events
  - Audience is listening for a story to be told
• Slow down, get into a flow with the game
• Be appropriately energetic & excited but never scream

Never apologize for a mistake
• Issue a correction instead
• Instead of “Sorry that foul was on Wesken not Robins”
• Say “Check that, credit the foul to Wesken”
• You’re correcting a mistake, not asking for forgiveness

Avoid audio crutches
• Stop saying “you know”, “uh”, “um” etc.
• Broadcasters use them to fill space and think of their next words
• They are pointless! The broadcast will sound much better if you omit them
• Listen when you critique yourself – What is your audio crutch?

Personality/Style
• Your personality and style will develop as you build your career
• Don’t force it, fake it or be something you’re not
• Develop your own natural style through practice and experience

Hydrate
• Drinking water during breaks will help you to stay fresh and keep your vocal chords lubricated
• Just be careful not to drink too much as there is no opportunities for a bathroom break during the game

Making Mistakes
• It’s ok to make mistakes
• Professional sportscasters have 500-1000 games of experience
  • They’ve made all their mistakes in those 1000 games
• Critique yourself and learn from your mistakes, but don’t psyche yourself out over them

Interruptions
• Stuff happens
  • Headset loosening, spotting board flies away, people interrupting, etc.
• Ignore the problem, regain composure as quickly as possible and call the rest of the game as if nothing happened
• Wait for a break to address the issue or get someone to help
Timing
- Know who talks when
  - Football: color commentator can speak after the play has ended up until the offense breaks the huddle
  - Basketball: color commentator can speak when the ball is in the backcourt or during dead ball situations (free throws, timeouts, after ball has been dropped in basket)
- It’s hard to let a partner know when to speak while on the air, so it is beneficial to establish guidelines and non-verbal cues before the broadcast
- Have a signal
  - If color commentator has something important to say, have a non-verbal signal so the play-by-play guy can set you up
  - Finger pointing/signals or eye contact

Working Together
- Both need to work together to tell the story of the game
- Don’t interrupt each other, talk over each other or talk too long
  - Don’t do the other person’s job
  - Color commentator needs to know when to stop talking and shouldn’t give play-by-play
    - Color can expand upon the description of a play after it has concluded and give additional details describing what happened, but shouldn’t talk over or give live play-by-play
  - Play-by-play commentator needs to share the mic and give the color commentator room to talk
    - Play-by-play can give initial & basic analysis as a way to bring the color commentator into the conversation, but shouldn’t do all the talking and take over the color role

Build Chemistry
- Go out to lunch, meet before the broadcast
- Get to know each other
- You will sound like you enjoy each other’s company and are conversational with each other

Go Over Storylines
- Prior to the game
  - Days/hours in advance
- Helps to be on the same page
  Collaborative effort
Call What You See
- It might seem obvious, but it is your job to describe to the listeners/viewers everything that is going on
- Be specific & give little details (especially for radio)
  - Will give your broadcast an additional element of description, make you sound more professional and help listeners to better visualize what is going on
- Instead of “Johnson hits one into left field, caught by Smith”
- Say “Johnson wires a deep ball sailing into left field, Smith backpedaling trying to get underneath it...makes an underhand catch”
- Instead of “In the gun, Bridgewater throws to McKinnon who goes down at the 37”
- Say “Shotgun formation 2 receivers to the left, 1 and a tight end to the right. Wallace motioning across the field to the far side. Bridgewater takes the snap, looks left, throws right, has McKinnon at the 37, pushing it forward to the 33.”

Court/Field Descriptions
- Need to have different ways to describe the same thing: location, action
- See description lists
- Know the dimensions of the playing area (varies for college vs pro) and use them in your broadcast when describing the action

Don’t Just Follow the Ball
- Especially when the game slows down you don’t always need to describe the ball movement
- Instead, include what is happening off-ball
  - Guys trying to get open, jockeying for position, setting up for a scoring chance, defensive pressure, formations, strategies, who is open, who is playing defense, who is coming into the game etc.

Off the Court/Field Action
- When you describe what is going on away from the player on the field it adds another element to your descriptions
  - Arena atmosphere
  - Weather
  - Fans
  - Coaches
- Don’t do it all the time or while something important is happening

Less is More
- Don’t over-call the game
  - Game slows down for anyone when they stop over-calling
- Know when to let the crowd/ambiance tell the story
  - Best broadcasters know when to stop talking
Pacing is Key
- Stay with the flow of the game
- Match your pacing to the speed of the action
- Don’t want to be behind the crowd
- Find the right balance
  - Don’t be too over-descriptive that you fall behind
  - Economy of words – say as much as you can in a few words as possible
- It’s easy to get caught up in how fast the game is going
- When this happens, recognize it, slow down and stay in control
- Use inflections and pauses for emphasis and dramatic effect

Manage Your Voice
- Save your voice for the big plays
- Don’t call everything like its game 7 of the NBA finals in a tie with 10 seconds left
- It’s good to give your voice life and inflection but don’t overdo it
- Be appropriately energetic & excited but never scream
Knowledge/Prep
- Show prep is just as important for a CA
- Need to know all the players and have defined talking points, stats, background info, storylines, etc. all built out before the broadcast
- Most of what PBP does is call the action so the above info will be even more vital for a CA as its their job to give analysis and add commentary to the broadcast

Know the Game
- Might sound obvious but it takes a lot of work
- Know the calls by the refs, why they make those calls, offenses/defenses being run by the teams, strategies/changes, playing techniques and why substitutions are being made
- Assuming, being wrong or not knowing these things will make you sound like an amateur
- Instead of just pointing out what is going on, describe why
  - Don’t assume the listeners know what you’re talking about
  - Give reasoning

Be Careful of Your Criticism
- Especially in college broadcasts you don’t want to heavily criticize any one player
- A player’s parents might be listening and you don’t want to be the jerk who scrutinizes a player who is trying their hardest and still learning
- Div III is different than pro or division I where players are getting paid/scholarships
- Same thing goes for coaches

Officiating
- Along the same lines, don’t overly criticize officials
- They are trying their best and make human mistakes
- It is ok to point out a blown call but don’t keep focusing on it and coming back to it

Blowouts
- It is unnecessary to classify a game as a blowout too early on, you want to keep your audience engaged and interested in the broadcast
- As a CA when your team is getting blown out you can talk about the upcoming opponents, give examples of what good things the losing team did and what concerns the team needs to address
- The last thing you want to say is “it’s the first quarter and this game is already over” because listeners will tune out

Homerism
- You want to be a reliable and trustworthy broadcaster who focuses on the facts and what is accurate
• You can support your team but don’t call the game as if the world is against them
• Opposing fans might be tuning in and want to hear a fair broadcast
• Know the game, call the details, and be fair to both teams with your team being the primary focus (but not opinionated toward one side)

Don’t Speculate on Injuries
• You are not a doctor
• Don’t try and diagnose an injury, you might be completely wrong and look like a fool
  o A player’s parents might be watching and you don’t want to freak them out
  o If an injury turns out to not be as serious as you describe, you will look bad
You can say a player appears inured and what part of their body they appear to be favoring but don’t attempt to diagnose or give a timetable
Matt Carpenter’s 4 P’s
• Proper Preparation and Pacing will keep you employed!

Patience and Preparation
• Patience is a valuable attribute
  o You never get it as fast as you want it
  o Have to pay your dues and get experience
• Preparation pays off
  o Understanding & processing the material
  o Stay organized
    ▪ Have a system that works for you
  o Like an open book test
    ▪ You’re allowed to use the notes during the game but you need to know the information going in
  o Need to know the board, have the board as a safety net
    ▪ It’s there to help you remember things

Breaking into Sportscasting
• Take what you can get
• Never turn down the chance to call a game
• Have thick skin & stick with it

Getting Experience Outside of School
• Take a portable recorder to a game (any game)
• Prepare as you would for a TV or radio game
• Call the game!
• Critique yourself

How to Prepare for a Job – What Employers Look For
• Have experience and reps - need to be ready to go
  o Doesn’t mean you have to have a job with a team
  o Take advantage of the opportunity in school
  o The more games you call, the better you will be
  o Can do it anywhere - Take a recorder to a game
• Have a demo
  o Whenever you call a game, get a recording
  o Listen, critique yourself and keep a list of your best calls for putting together your demo
• Important skills
  o Time-management skills
  o Independent worker
  o Organized
- Be the Right Fit
  - Each school & job is different
  - Highlight how you relate to the school/team/job
  - How do you interact with fans, coaches, players etc.
  - Know as much as you can about the program

How to Build a Play-by-Play Demo
- Start with a 60 second highlight track
  - Include at least one highlight from each sport
  - Best work first!
- Arrange next tracks by best sport
- 8-12 minute football track
  - Start with time and score
  - End with TD
- 8-12 minute basketball track
  - Start with time and score
  - End with exciting basket
- 2 baseball tracks
  - Complete half inning with scoring (excitement, big plays)
  - Complete slow half inning (demonstrates ability to fill time and tell stories)
- 8-12 minute hockey track
  - Start with time and score
  - End with a goal
- Remove commercials
- No late game heroics
  - Employers want to hear what you do with the other 99% of the broadcast
- Can also include an interview

Biggest Demo Problems
- Having an audio crutch
  - Repeated, unnecessary behavior
  - Saying the same phrase/word to fill time when you are thinking or don’t know what to say
  - Ex: saying um, uh, exactly, yeah etc.
- Using catch phrases
  - No need for catch phrases
  - Don’t ever include catch phrases in a demo
- Not describing the action in different ways
  - Need to have synonyms and different court/action descriptions
  - Can only say the same thing so many times before it gets repetitive and annoying