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ALERT

TOP STORY

ARIZONA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Reliable Arizona basketball voice Derrick Palmer talks passion, favorite buckets, young Cats making strides

PJ Brown

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Arizona women's basketball coach Adia Barnes, right, and Wildcat play-by-play voice Derrick Palmer chat during the UA's trip to The Bahamas for the Battle 4 Atlantis event earlier this season.

Ryan Thorne, Arizona Athletics

PJ Brown

Raise your hand if this was you last Friday night: You settled in and turned on Pac-12 Networks' Arizona-specific channel to watch the Arizona-Washington women's basketball game, only to see that it was actually airing ASU vs. Washington State.

So you scrambled to either go to the Pac-12 Now app, or to find the link on your laptop; only then did you eventually find the game on Pac-12 Washington.

Some of you may have given up before that point. But others — many of you, to be sure — went to the source you know is *always* on and ready to be your eyes and ears on all things happening during an UA women's hoops matchup: Derrick Palmer.

Palmer, who can be found on 1290-AM — as long as UA men's basketball or football isn't playing at the same time, then tune into 1400-AM — has been calling games just about every season since 2007-08, which was former UA coach Joan Bonvicini's final season.

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As part of Palmer's gig, he also leads the Adia Barnes radio show alongside Arizona's head coach on Tuesday night's at 5:30 p.m. MST. During the week, he can be found teaching at Mesa Community College.

The Star sat down with Palmer ahead of his call of UA's first home game in three weeks against Cal (13-6, 3-4), this Friday night at 7 p.m. MST at McKale Center.

Arizona (10-9, 2-5) is looking to end a four-game losing skid.

Palmer has seen the ups and downs of the Wildcats program while bringing his passion to the mic on a nightly basis. One of his most unusual calls was the 2021 Final Four from an office in McKale Center as it was the COVID-19 season when

he wasn't able to travel in UA's bubble in San Antonio.

He's also seen a bird fly into Cal's Haas Pavilion and do its thing ahead of a big game in the Bay Area. Somehow the facilities crew was able to coax the bird outside, keeping the court was clean during the game.

Palmer shared a little on what he sees this season, his preparation process, as well as his favorite calls.

You have a front row seat to every game. How would you evaluate this season so far?

A: "I think that they are playing incredibly hard. The freshmen are clearly making huge strides that don't always show up in the box score. But for example, watching (Breya) Cunningham against Washington State (and) their big frontline. They're trying to go toward the basket, (she) tried to use her off arm to try to deflect shot or shot blocking attempts, things of that nature. Just doing those little things that eventually are going to pay dividends — that right now aren't. And a lot of that is just because they're playing in such an incredibly tough basketball league. An incredibly tough basketball league."

What goes into preparing to call a game?

A: "I think very linearly. First thing I'll do is I'll make a roster that goes numerically. So, I can quickly look down and see without having to search through positions or situations or anything like that. I'll print that out and then write out their season numbers, and then what they did in the last game or if they played Arizona previously this season. I'll write out how (the opponent) performed against Arizona the last time. I'll also make notes of anything that happened spectacularly that had in the previous game. It wasn't against Arizona, but that just helps me kind of start to shape the potential narrative or something to keep my eye on. We start the broadcast with the introductory segments that are recorded — the interviews that I have with the assistant coaches. All of that continues to just build potential narrative for when the game starts."

You've been calling games for quite a while now. When did you really get in your groove and it all start clicking for you?

A: “Maybe when Adia first got here (2016-17 season). I started working by myself for the first time and that was a huge adjustment. I was constantly having to fill (time) and it took me a while. That was also around time I had fully appreciated everything the stat monitors were offering. It took a bit of an effort to train — continually looking at the stat monitor while trying to keep an eye on the game. I'll miss a couple of plays a game during that but I feel like it's a fair trade. Just making sure that there's a little bit of extra colors since I'm not an expert. I can't necessarily analyze what's going on as far as the play goes, but I can feed some statistical information that otherwise somebody might not have noticed.”

What do you love about your role?

A: “I'm an alumna here. I grew up, we listened to games on the radio. My dad didn't pay for cable until I was in high school. We would get to watch the home games on an affiliate out of Prescott KUSK and then I listened to (longtime UA men's basketball and football voice) Brian Jeffries, who called the road men's basketball games, and I listened to him to most of the football games as well, because they were very rarely on TV. Having grown up with Brian's presence in our household so prominently and then getting to play a small part of that for other people is a thrill that my adolescent self would have never been able to even dream of.

“I love the game. I think that the rest of the world is wrong. Basketball is the beautiful game, not soccer. When everything is working well and everybody's playing their role it's symphonic. The opportunity to try to describe that is a very, very great pleasure and thrill for me.”

Are there any calls that stand out to you?

A: “Two games. A more recent one was Aari McDonald's bucket (layup) to beat Stanford (73-72 overtime win in February 2020). Aari's was special because it

signified the program's arrival. Having spent so many years watching the program try to elevate itself to these levels, every successful ballgame feels like a reflection of how far it's come. It's impossible to forget the lengths that it's gone.

“The other one is the Candice Warthen's last second shot (jumper) to beat Stanford (60-57 win in February 2015). One of my favorites because it was so unexpected. Both were really fun.”

What was the best advice you received as you were starting out in the business and in turn, what tips do you give to those starting now?

A: “The first time I talked to Brian (Jeffries) and I told him what I wanted to do, he said that whenever he listened to himself all he could hear was the mistakes and just to go right by them. Gosh, more than 20 years ago I got that advice from him. So many times, I say the wrong thing during a broadcast and I just try my very best to ignore it. Because otherwise you're just constantly apologizing and restating something.

“My advice I give is to try and quickly identify your own voice. Get behind the microphone as often as you can and workshop an approach.”

Arizona Women's Basketball Press Conference | Adia Barnes | Jan. 24, 2024 (Arizona Wildcats YouTube)