The 2016 baseball season is now officially in the books, and in broadcasting terms, it was one of the most momentous in history. Two Ford Frick Award-winning broadcasters, Vin Scully (1982) and Dick Enberg (2015), have stepped away from their baseball mics for good and now head off to their next adventure. (Not for nothing, but Bill Brown, radio play-by-play man for the Astros for the past three decades, is also hanging up the mic, although he has not yet received the Ford Frick Award himself.)

Enberg had a great career, no doubt, but it is universally acknowledged that Scully had been, for a span of at least a decade and a half, the unchallenged, unquestioned dean of baseball broadcasters, mantles previously held by such luminaries as Red Barber, Bob Elson, Byrum Saam, Jack Brickhouse, Mel Allen, Harry Caray, Chuck Thompson, and Ernie Harwell.

Now that Scully is gone, and that Enberg and Brown have headed off into the sunset with him, we now need to contemplate who among the current mikemen should now be considered the Dean of Baseball Broadcasters. That’s what I am asking you, the reader, to do here today: vote for who you believe should take on that exalted title.

The Game is currently blessed with dozens of great, long-time baseball play by play and color commentators. In fact, no fewer than thirty current broadcasters have 30 or more years in the business, an unprecedentedly high number. Not all of them, of course, can...
qualify for Dean status. But in our opinion, the eight broadcasters who have 40 or more years of experience can qualify, so those are who we would like you to vote on today.

The eight on this ballot include:

- **Jaime Jarrín**: With the Dodgers since 1959, he is the currently the longest-serving Spanish-language radio play-by-play broadcaster in history. In 1998, Jarrín received the Ford C. Frick Award from the Baseball Hall of Fame.
- **Dave Van Horne**: Hired as the first Expos English-language radio play-by-play announcer in 1969. Moved to the Marlins in 2001. In 2011, was the recipient of the Ford C. Frick Award.
- **Denny Matthews**: Hired in 1969 as the first (and still only) radio play-by-play announcer for Kansas City Royals. In 2007, was the recipient of the Ford C. Frick Award.
- **Bob Uecker**: Began calling play-by-play for the Brewers’ radio broadcasts in 1971. In 2003, was the recipient of the Ford C. Frick Award.
- **Mike Shannon**: Hired as radio color commentator by the Cardinals in 1972; became the lead voice after Jack Buck’s death in 2002.
- **Marty Brennaman**: Reds radio play-by-play announcer since 1974. In 2000, was the recipient of the Ford C. Frick Award.
- **Jon Miller**: Also well-traveled, first with the A’s for the 1974 season, and had subsequent tenures with the Rangers (1978), Red Sox (1980) and Orioles (1983) before landing with the Giants in 1997. In 2010, was the recipient of the Ford C. Frick Award.

And now is the time for you to vote for who you believe the Dean of broadcasters should be, below. You may vote for one, two or three broadcasters you believe deserve this august title. Teams and first year broadcasting are shown next to the nominees’ names.

Who Now Becomes the Dean of Baseball Broadcasters?

- Jaime Jarrín (Dodgers, 1959)
- Denny Matthews (Royals, 1969)
- Dave Van Horne (Expos/Marlins, 1969)
- Mike Shannon (Cardinals, 1972)
- Marty Brennaman (Reds, 1974)
- Jon Miller (A’s/Rangers/Red Sox/Orioles/Giants, 1974)
- Ken Harrelson (Red Sox/Yankees/White Sox, 1975)
- Bob Uecker (Brewers, 1972)

View Results
The National Pastime Museum is a website rich with historical baseball articles written by some of SABR’s brightest lights, as well as some of the top working journalists in the game. If you haven't been there yet, head on over when you've got a few minutes to kill.

An interesting baseball media article published there recently was written by Paul Dickson, who is probably most famous in baseball circles for publishing The Dickson Baseball Dictionary, which you can buy here or, if you have at least a halfway decent library available to you, check it out from there. But Dickson has authored enough baseball and non-baseball books, over 65 of them, to have a pretty impressive Wikipedia page dedicated to him.

The article Dickson recently published, which we republish in full below, is titled "How Radio Gave Baseball Its Voice", and while it’s not a comprehensive history of baseball on the radio, it does include some of the key figures of the early radio business, and is a nice, easy, breezy read.

Thanks to Becki Hartke, Director of the National Pastime Museum. You can join almost 2,500 other followers of their twitter feed at @TNPMMuseum.

HOW RADIO GAVE BASEBALL ITS VOICE

By Paul Dickson
On August 5, 1921, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a 25-year-old studio announcer for radio station KDKA sat in a box seat behind home plate in Forbes Field. Using only a converted telephone as a microphone and some jury-rigged equipment, Harold Arlin broadcast the first Major League Baseball game, calling every play in a game between the Pirates and the Phillies, which the Pirates won 8–5.

Arlin later recalled that this pioneering event was merely an experiment—a “one-off”—and that most of the staff at the station thought that baseball would never be commercially viable on radio.

For the moment the conclusion reached by Arlin and his peers seemed on target. That year’s World Series between the New York Yankees and the New York Giants was broadcast locally, and the broadcast the following year of the 1922 World Series was linked to more than one station, but these were novelties with little impact on the regular baseball season or the consciousness of the fans.

The first great radio success came in 1923 with the Chicago Cubs, which was due to the open-mindedness of Phil Wrigley, the owner of the Chicago Cubs, and his progressive president William Veeck—not to be confused with his son Bill Veeck. Wrigley, a great advocate of advertising, had been the perfect owner for Veeck to work with. One of the combined legacies of the two men was radio, which both men saw as the perfect vehicle for selling the Cubs as a regional franchise. Veeck especially welcomed free radio coverage of Cubs games, and one of the reasons he gave for this was that radio educated new fans in the subtleties of baseball, and this was especially true for women. Wrigley firmly believed that radio would increase ticket sales and yield a wider regional fan base.

Late in the 1923 season, Judith Waller, managing director of radio station WMAQ, came to Wrigley asking for a 30-day trial of broadcasting live Cubs games. At the end of the trial, listeners were asked to send in letters expressing their feelings about the
broadcasts. The letters came in bundles from all over the Midwest. A Wisconsin dentist wrote, “I have had no trouble with my patients since I installed the radio for the Cubs games. They sit and listen and let me work.” An Indiana farmer wrote that he had a radio rigged in his field and caught the score as he finished each turn of the plow. He said, “Don’t stop it.”

The experimenting continued and culminated on June 1, 1925, when WMAQ became the first station in the United States to broadcast every home baseball game, an arrangement that continued for many seasons. Surprisingly, the deal with WMAQ was not exclusive, and the Cubs allowed other broadcasters to set up next to the press box and provide live accounts of the game on the radio. At any given moment through the late 1920s, as many as five radio stations carried the games live. But the key was WMAQ, a clear-channel 50,000-watt monster that could be heard over much of the Midwest in the day and over most of the East Coast at night when the AM signal was stronger. “The middle as well as the country at large was becoming Cub-conscious,” newsman John P. Carmichael later wrote of the WMAQ deal. “The team was on its way to fame and fortune.”

In his 1946 history of the Cubs, journalist Warren Brown maintained that beyond spreading the Cubs gospel, radio did increase attendance for the team. His evidence: from 1918 to 1924, when the Cubs averaged fourth place in the National League standings, they drew 3,585,439 patrons for that seven-year period; and from 1925 to 1931, with a club that averaged fourth place in the National League standings, the Cubs, for that seven-year period, drew 7,845,700 patrons. To quote Brown, “That represents a gain of 119%. Over the same period, the other seven clubs gained 27% in home attendance.”

But despite the success of the Cubs as the decade wore on, a majority of the other teams were increasingly fearful, believing radio would cut down on ticket sales by allowing the lukewarm fan—or the fan with little disposable income—to stay home and get a word picture of the game for nothing. The Boston teams—the NL Boston Bees (later the Braves) and the Red Sox—began broadcasting some of their games in 1926.

**IS RADIO GOOD FOR BASEBALL?—J. M. Gould**

*Baseball Magazine, July 1930*

Then along came the crash of 1929 and the fear of broadcasting seemed to intensify. Owners pointed to the declining sales of sheet music and phonograph records as evidence of radio’s negative impact on traditional media. But there was one notable exception—in 1929 the Cincinnati Reds became the second club to air regular radio broadcasts of all their home games.

In December 1931, 11 of 16 Major League teams came to the winter meetings in Chicago planning to establish a ban on all radio coverage, but the measure had to be tabled. The night before the
ban was to be discussed, the Cubs had agreed to a new radio contract for the 1932 season, infuriating those who feared the consequences. President William Harridge of the American League intimated that if radio became an issue with the newspapers, he would recommend that broadcasts be eliminated. “Newspaper publicity made baseball,” said Harridge, who had the support of the Baseball Writers Association, which had expressed the belief that radio was cutting down on the sale of “EXTRA” editions of their newspapers. [ii] [iii]

As the Depression deepened, the opinion of the majority of owners solidified around the notion that radio kept fans from the ballpark. Nowhere was this belief more strongly held than in the greater New York area, where, in 1934, a five-year pact between the Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants, and the New York Yankees went into effect banning all radio coverage. Added to this fear that radio was sapping the vitality of baseball was the emergence of serial melodramas known as soap operas, which often ran when afternoon games were played.

If radio was declared the enemy of baseball in New York, it was not universal. The Cincinnati Reds reported that radio was adding to ticket sales, and the commitment to the medium redoubled when Powel Crosley, the largest manufacturer of radios in the world, bought the team in 1934.

Crosley’s general manager was Larry MacPhail, the red-faced, sandy-haired, heavy-drinking protégé of Branch Rickey who had revived the ailing Reds and turned them into a money-making contender. His innovations in Cincinnati included regular radio broadcasts employing another redhead—a young Floridian named Red Barber—and night baseball.

MacPhail was hired by the Brooklyn Dodgers during the winter of 1938–39, and on February 5, MacPhail announced that the Dodgers would be the first team to break the New York area radio ban, and all of the team’s games would be broadcast on WOR—a 50,000-watt powerhouse of a station. Sponsors had been lined up, and broadcaster Red Barber was hired to be the voice of the team.


Later in the month at the National League winter meeting, the Giants announced they were also opting out of the radio agreement. At the end of that meeting, the only radio holdout in
either league was the New York Yankees, which succumbed shortly thereafter. [iv]

Meanwhile, after being first hired by MacPhail, Barber went to spring training to get the lowdown on the players so that he could talk about them—and not just what they did between the white lines. New Yorkers had heard him before—and apparently liked him despite or because of his homespun southern delivery—as the announcer for the 1938 World Series and radio voice of the Army–Notre Dame football game staged at Yankee Stadium a few months earlier. His voice, made for radio, was soothing, and his approach to calling a game was colorful and rich in rural metaphor—Ebbets Field would soon become “the Flatbush pea patch.” Barber was a man of “you alls” and “yes, ma’ams” headed for a place mocked for “dems” and “dose.” [v]

Barber was one of the most influential of the new broadcast personalities who gave the game its voice through the war years and beyond and in the process became as important to the face of many teams as the players themselves. Another such figure was Mel Allen, another southern voice, who became the Yankee’s first play-by-play man. During his long radio career, Allen called more World Series (20) and All-Star Games (24) on radio than anyone in history. Barber, who later went to the Yankees after 15 years with the Dodgers, was also instrumental in the development of another brilliant redhead, Vin Scully. Beginning with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1950, Scully apprenticed under his watchful eyes and critical ears. The amazing Scully has called Dodgers games on two coasts in seven decades including the present one.

As it turned out, radio became the vehicle by which baseball thrived. As Gerald Nachman put it in his book Raised on Radio, “Radio quickly became a crucial arm of sports in America, spreading the gospel of baseball in the 1920s to 1950s.”

When television came along, the fear was that radio would be the loser to the new medium, but radio remains vital today as teams set up their own networks to keep far-flung fans connected to their favorite teams. Currently, the last team to buy into radio has 52 stations linked on the Yankees Radio Network, which reaches across 15 states including Alaska.
Normally reserved for a crisis—but often extended to baseball—these were special editions hastily printed and hawked by street vendors. During a World Series, there would be at least one newsboy on every corner.

Chicago Tribune, December 17, 1938.

Very few of us reading this article ever heard an actual re-created baseball game on the radio, but game re-creation was the norm for away games for nearly every team broadcasting their games on the radio.
radio from the dawn of broadcasting well into the 1950s. Almost all of us knew that already, but if you didn’t, you know now.

But even though we know, intellectually, that this was the state of the baseball broadcast art, probably very few of us have thought very deeply about how this art was executed. We perhaps don’t often close our eyes and imagine what a re-created baseball game would sound like, and the effort that went into making it sound like a real, live baseball game.

Committee member Bob Barrier has, and he wrote a nice little piece a few years ago about, as he terms it, the aesthetics of re-creating a road ball game on the radio for a team’s fans to enjoy at home. While the whole idea of re-creating a baseball game from a telegraph wire might sound a bit like a silly exercise to undergo, sending broadcast equipment and an announcer on the road was prohibitively expensive at the time, and besides, teams usually had room to house only one broadcast team, obviously for the home team’s broadcast (which probably explains why the Brooklyn Dodgers re-created road games even at the New York Giants’ Polo Grounds, less than 15 miles away). But the fans still wanted and needed to hear their own team play even when they were playing on the road, and thus: the re-creation.

Barrier’s piece is reproduced in full below, having first appeared in the tome entitled Baseball/Literature/Culture: Essays, 2006-2007. Especially illuminating is his interview with Nat Allbright, little known today but widely considered the “king of the baseball re-creators” throughout the Fifties, having worked some 1,500 Brooklyn Dodger road games for the Mutual Network from his studio in, of all places, Washington D.C. During the interview, Barrier asked Allbright to simulate a baseball re-creation for him, and … well, I invite you to just read it, below.

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**Only the Game Was Real**

**The Aesthetics and Significance of Re-created Baseball Broadcasting**

Robert G. Barrier

The huge success of XM Satellite Radio’s Major League Baseball broadcasts the past two years has highlighted a truth almost forgotten. Even in these days of high-definition television, streaming Internet video, and play-by-play graphical Web sites, baseball on the radio still remains the most compelling, imaginative, nostalgic, and personal way to participate as a “spectator” from a distance. Indeed, radio announcers maintain the seams of nostalgia, and in their different ways make the listener a daily participant in the game. But for some of these listeners, particularly those who lived in the rural South and Midwest from the 1930s to the 1950s, the imaginary stadiums constructed for them came from announcers re-creating the actual games from Western Union tickers miles away from the actual game. The re-created games, which often relied on recorded crowd noises, audio clips of bats hitting the ball or the ball hitting the glove, were also embellished by the imaginative patter of word
Arch McDonald was one of the early pioneers of baseball game re-creation on the radio. Here he is hard at work on Washington’s WJSV.

Early on, electronics connected the nation of fans with largely factual accounts devoid of creative imagination. The earliest commercial radio station, KDKA in Pittsburgh, broadcast scores during the summer of 1921 and carried the first live broadcast on August 5. The following year, RCA-Westinghouse broadcast the 1922 Series from the Polo Grounds, arranging for famous sportswriter Grantland Rice to report to an audience, which was called by the New York Tribune “the greatest audience ever assembled to listen to one man” (qtd. in Tygiel 65). Even competing stations in New York went silent so that listeners could hear the broadcasts. But for all of Rice’s brilliant poetry, the creator of the famous image “the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” failed in on-air reporting. He simply described what happened in “a little flat, atonal voice somewhat awkwardly modulated and unmistakably Southern.” Of this experience he would later report, “The broadcast officials wanted me to keep talking. But I didn’t know what to say” (qtd. in Tygiel 68).

The tradition of the personalized broadcast began in 1923 with Graham McNamee’s conveying the atmosphere and the imagination of on-air baseball. A singer brought to New York to develop his talent, he “understood pacing, style, and performing for an audience, even one he could not see” (Tygiel 69). Whereas the Western Union operator was expected to remain, “perfectly cool and collected, no matter what happens … and would be chided by the manager if he did bring in personality,” McNamee recognized that the new medium required a different approach: “to avoid dead silence, I found myself more than ever falling back on general description. And that is where the imagination comes in” (qtd. in Tygiel 69).

Though sportswriters groused and criticized the showmanship, McNamee successfully made every listener a spectator, enabling them “to use their eyes” by “paint[ing] word pictures that other minds could feast upon…. Very little imagination was required … especially when the announcer turned his microphone on the roaring, booing and cheering crowd” (Tygiel 71). Very soon teams in the Midwest began regular season broadcasts, especially in Chicago, but not in the eastern cities where there were larger population centers as well as many more major newspapers. In more scattered areas of the Midwest, broadcasts could extend the drawing area to 100 miles or more. Even the Sporting News, self-described as “baseball’s bible,” criticized broadcasts because of economics—fans wouldn’t pay for what they got free. Essentially, radio coverage
democratized Major League Baseball, making it more accessible and intimate to those far away from the stadiums; as Jules Tygiel observes, “the process had become more familial or individualistic, replacing the communal experience with a more isolated one” (72).

As the listening audience expanded, so too did the need for announcers like McNamee who approached the game with a showman’s view. Many of the most popular announcers of the 1940s and 1950s were southerners, including industry legends like Red Barber, Mel Allen, Arch McDonald, Ernie Harwell, and Russ Hodges, all of whom made famous peculiar southern expressions and maintained a narrative rhythm reminiscent of the southern oral traditions of local color and humor. Perhaps it is this storytelling tradition—and their professionalism—that enabled so many of these broadcasters to approach baseball games as story, humor, and spectacle while maintaining the reportage narrative that was their main duty. Harwell, recently retired after 56 years of broadcasting, accounts for the distinctive southern voice as a natural result of the southern oral tradition, so many stories told at evenings on the porch or in the kitchen (Kaufman).

One might trace this loquaciousness back to Mark Twain and the southwestern humor tradition, but there remains a significant difference. Whereas the point of a Simon Wheeler or a Eudora Welty character is to stray far afield from the initial conversational subject, southern baseball announcers restrained themselves to commentary between pitches (Harwell says he never told a story he could not finish within the inning and he insisted upon giving the score as often as possible). It was a studied but natural patter of talk, not an extended yarn. And also there was the distinctive southern accent:

Ernie Harwell still sounds like old radio…. His style is conversational, sure, but he’s not just talking. He’s broadcasting…. People talk about his Southern lilt, and you can hear it on the air if you’re listening for it, but more noticeable is the precise, clipped diction of a 1940s radio man who has to make himself understood through the static and noise of a distant Philco (Kaufman).

Likewise, southerners also played a significant role in the lost art of re-creating live baseball games for later broadcast. In the first radio recreated games, which date to 1921, a reporter telephoned details of the action to a radio announcer, who in turn dictated the game to a very limited audience. Many re-creators made no bones about the fact that they were re-creating but others went to great lengths for the illusion of reality. Willie Morris, in *North Toward Home*, praises McNamee for making each game an epic contest and recounts how he won money from his childhood acquaintances by predicting upcoming events in re-created games after he had heard the real games earlier via shortwave. And even though, according to Dodger re-creator Nat Allbright, the law required re-creator announcers to make a statement that the game was re-created at both the beginning and the end, most listeners thought the games were real. In the ’30s and ’40s, almost all teams—major and minor—re-created games, with most teams re-creating only away games to save money. Many older fans recalled how they preferred the created game to the actual, since the re-creator had a 10 to 30 minute lead time,
except that occasionally the teletype would fail. Ronald Reagan, who did Cubs games throughout the Midwest, had to invent, on more than one occasion, marathon foul balls, fights, or power failures.

Perhaps the most popular of the studio broadcasters, Allbright led the second largest network (next to Mutual’s Game of the Day) – 26 states and 117 stations—out of Virginia from 1950 to 63. Allbright calls what he did a science, using both high and low technology. High-tech resources included tape recordings of “background roar” and “excited crowd” noises; a recording of each stadium’s separate singing of the national anthem; and having a colleague listen to the live game in the next room, or following it via Morse code. Low-tech tools included rapping a pencil against the table for the crack of the bat, crinkling a cigarette wrapper for thunder, or having someone in a nearby bathroom play the role of the echoing PA announcer (Allbright).

Although they had a lead-time from the actual games, the successful re-creators also had to follow the broadcast atmosphere created by McNamee and other live announcers. To Allbright and other re-creators, the artful process required pacing, pause, timing, and building to control the whole tempo of the broadcast. Having the extra time gave a re-creating announcer an opportunity to add the effective comments for his team. For example, broadcasting live, Russ Hodges is famous for screaming after Bobby Thompson hit the “shot heard around the world” in the Giants-Dodgers playoff in 1951: “The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant!” Allbright, the Dodger re-creating announcer, did it this way:

I announced that Clem Labine was coming in to pitch, then had to change it to Ralph Branca when that was corrected. Suddenly, my associate in the next room started waving his arms like the ball was gone. When he handed me a piece of paper confirming what had happened. I said, ‘A drive to left field—back, back, and that ball is gone! … Unbelievable! It’s out, and I’ll see you next season” (qtd. in Heller).

To further illustrate the pacing and process of re-created games, Allbright, during a personal interview, agreed to re-create a game from the ‘50s, while sitting in the glass-enclosed office. While the action below likely only exists in his mind, one should notice how he still uses pacing, byplay, tempo, imagery, and building to make this imaginary game come alive:
Alright, let's see... We'll open it up in the top half of the ninth inning. The Dodgers lead 3-2. The Giants have the tying run at third and the go-ahead run is at first base with one down. Mueller is on at third and he's talking now to Leo Durocher. That's the tying run and Dusty Rhodes at first for the New York Giants. Dusty came in and hit for Jorgenson here in the ninth and singled to right in front of Carl Flunk. And the batter will be Willie Mays—number 24. He has one for three, right-handed batter. He doubled in the fourth and drove in a run.

Don Newcombe on the mound for the Dodgers, pulls off his cap, walks over now, picks up the rosin bag, looks toward third.

Gil Hodges with the go-ahead run at first base will play close to the bag. He will play the runner Rhodes. He will not be in back of him. Andy Palko back in deep left. Duke Snider, left center. Carl Furillo in right-center field. With Don Hoak third. Pee Wee Reese at shortstop and... Jackie Robinson at second and Gil Hodges at first.

Campanella, in front of the plate, holds up one finger now. Runners on the corners as Willie Mays moves into the batter's box. Don Newcombe cannot pitch around Willie Mays because the on-deck hitter is Bobby Thompson.

Mays swinging his club back and forth. Newcombe stretches. Looks back to first. Now takes his foot off the rubber. Wipes... pitching hand across DODGERS on the front of the uniform.

Game time tomorrow evening. Friday, will be at seven. Saturday afternoon at one and Sunday at one. And that will finish up the four game set.

The Dodgers lead the National League by four games over these Giants. Newcombe ready, comes in with the pitch... and it's... inside, close for a ball.

Mays steps out of the batter's box... goes down for a handful of dirt. It's a bright sunny day with a temperature of about 84 degrees... at Ebbets Field and the wind is blowing... toward right. [Three second delay.]

Newcombe ready on the mound, looks in for the sign, set and delivers. And a SWING and a MISS for a strike.

It's one and one for Willie Mays. We're in the bottom half of the ninth inning. Bobby Thompson on deck and it's a 3-2 ball game. The Dodgers lead by one. Tying run is at third.

Newcombe... on the mound. This guy can let it go. He can make that ball look like an aspirin tablet.

Don Newcombe. Ready. Set. Comes down with the pitch. There's a GROUND ball past the mound, going to Reese. Reese up with it, over to Robinson. THERE'S ONE. Back to first: A DOUBLE PLAY AND THE DODGERS GET OUT OF IT IN THE NINTH and WIN THE BALL GAME by a score of 3 to 2 over the New York Giants.
So they win the first game of this four game set. And Newcombe and Roy Campanella down below celebrating. There’s Reese, Jackie Robinson, and Gil Hodges. And it’s the HATED Giants GO DOWN in the first game of this four game set.

This is Nat Allbright at ... Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, New York. Re-created and ... tomorrow game time will be at seven.

I’ll be back right after these words from ... YOUR local ... beer dealer.

Ok? [ends]

Without the constant noise level of the imaginary crowd, the hum and buzz of excitement, note how Allbright moves in a controlled tempo, with few breaks in the delivery and only one mistake (calling the Giants’ inning the bottom half though the game was at Ebbets Field—perhaps unconsciously thinking of the infamous Thompson home run?). In fact, Allbright’s abilities to convey the color and tension of a real game by his delivery stand out even more without the canned noise. Notice also that Allbright makes the event and his “telling of it” personal without intervening in the game: ‘It’s a bright sunny day with a temperature of about 84 degrees ... at Ebbets Field and the wind is blowing ... toward right,” hesitating, as if he were actually checking the pennants blowing in the outfield. Another aspect of the “personal” in Allbright’s above sample that differs from some earlier broadcasters and many current ones is that he functions first as a reporter, rather than a fan. Though obviously a “homer” he refrains from pulling directly for the Dodgers, an element many modern team network broadcasters bypass.

The Allbright re-creation transcribed above reveals how “reportage” can be made vivid by rhythm, figurative language (Newcombe “can make that ball look like an aspirin tablet”), pauses, and pacing. As an indication of the difference in engagement between re-created baseball by Nat Allbright and on-site baseball broadcasting, one might compare the 1950s’ broadcasts of Mutual’s Game-of-the-Day (live) and Nat Allbright’s re-created Dodgers games. By that time, many major league teams were playing games at night during the week and so many weekday games came from Wrigley Field or from minor league venues. I recall coming home from school September afternoons to hear those Mutual games from Chicago and even sometimes from Yankee Stadium when the weather turned too cold for night games: those were long afternoons filled with leisurely and slow games, the action interspersed with banter, such as how announcer Bob Neal’s last name backwards seemed to spell “Lean,” a conversation I somehow recall from fifty years ago! Though I did not perceive of it until recently when I heard the Allbright re-creation, the re-created games from the Dodger network were far more appealing because of the constant hum and ebb and flow of canned background “noise far louder than any real stadium could be, each inning rising to a climactic sound level, almost like eighteen horse races. In another indication of the “reality” of the re-created broadcasts, Allbright recounted during the interview how some of the thousands of listeners from small towns of the South and the Midwest attending spring training games in Florida would seek out the Dodger’s broadcast booth and refuse to accept that Red Barber was the only
on-site announcer. Indeed, I remember my own friends in 1957 ready to fight me for telling them that Nat Allbright’s broadcasts were re-created, a fact I had learned from the Sporting News.

Allbright remembers Mel Allen telling him that the baseball re-creator had the best of both worlds, broadcasting the games yet getting to remain at home and “sleep in (his) own bed at night.” In many similar ways, the lucky listeners of those re-created games also had the best circumstances possible: the ability to hear the results of the game, the opportunity to listen to a word artist’s re-creations, and the pleasures of the imagination to participate in the game itself in one’s mind’s eye—and ear.

WORKS CITED


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If you have any interesting artifacts that you can share related to baseball media, whether it is old photographs, articles, recordings, or even a personal anecdote you would like to share, and you would like to have it published on the website, please feel free to send it along, or contact me at ch *at* sabrmedia.org.

All submissions are welcome and will receive equal consideration for publication. You do not need to be a member of SABR or of the Baseball and the Media Committee to submit, and if published, you will receive full and effusive credit.
Red Barber, the sports announcer who for years broadcast Brooklyn Dodger baseball games and later those of the New York Yankees, has joined National Public Radio as a commentator on "Morning Edition," heard daily 6 to 8 A.M. Mr. Barber, a sportscaster for over 50 years, can be heard live each Friday morning at 7:35 on WNYC AM (83.0) and WNYC FM (93.9). He joins the program's other sports commentators, Frank Deford, Frank Herzog, Jane Chastain and Harry Edwards.

January 8, 1981, Page 00022 The New York Times Archives. Subscribe and see the full article in TimesMachin - Red Barber, the sportscasting pioneer whose Southern lilt evoked timeless images of baseball on a hot summer afternoon, died Thursday of lung and kidney complications. He was 84. He died at 11:14 a.m. EDT in the Tallahassee Memorial Regional Medical Center, hospital spokesman Warren Jones said. But wherever he went, Barber brought his soft poetic touches. With a Mississippi drawl recognizable throughout baseball, Barber introduced his own language to the game. A player might be 'tearin' up the pea patch' or 'running like a bunny with his tail on fire.' Sometimes, a pitcher was as 'wild as a chicken hawk on a frosty morning.' Other times, the bases would be 'FOB' (full of Brolyns).