

My Favorite Pat Summitt off the court experiences:

05/15/2012 Debbie Antonelli

With the announcement that Pat Summitt is stepping aside at Tennessee, media attention has been focused on her legacy as an icon in the game and in women's sports. Coach Summitt had a profound effect on many that have a role in the game. I've been broadcasting women's basketball games on TV for 24 years and had the pleasure of covering Pat Summitt most of those years. I would like to share some stories about Pat that are examples about her lighter side. It is fun to be an associate of Pat's. I have many behind the scenes stories but these are a few of the highlights for me:

"The Practical Joker"

I enter Tennessee's locker room before the game while the team is going thru pre-game warm ups to visit with Coach Summitt. I mention to Pat "it's a good thing you don't watch your team warm up before the game because they don't use a ball! They have bells and whistles, cones and defensive slides but no ball. I've seen no jump shots!" Summitt kicks me out of the locker room for my distraction. I return to my broadcast location. Minutes before tip, the UT strength coach approaches me with a quick cadence and a grim look. She says Coach Summitt fired her because of what I said about Tennessee's warm ups. I'm mortified to think Coach Summitt fired her based on what I said! Then she says she was just kidding. I look towards the UT Bench and Coach Summitt is laughing. She got me!

"The Shirt off Her Back"

Tennessee at Georgia halftime speech with camera access. I'm working with Beth Mowins courtside. Pat has removed her suit jacket revealing her shirt. I tell Mowins Pat should give me that shirt since she never wears the same apparel twice. 2nd half resumes, Tenn wins and we go into the UT locker room post game to visit. I tell Pat I loved the shirt she was wearing and since she doesn't wear the same thing twice she should give her shirt to me. She laughs and shrugs it off. We continue to chat with the staff as Pat slips off into the locker room. She returns with her shirt in her hands and her suit jacket buttoned up to her chin and gives me her sweat wore shirt. Mowins adds she liked the watch Pat was wearing but she doesn't get her watch!

"The Name Dropper"

February 5, 2009, Pat Summitt reaches 1000 wins over Georgia and I'm on the call. I visit with Pat after the game but I have an 8am meeting in Indianapolis the next morning. I'm planning to drive the 6 hour trip thru the night alone. I visit with Pat to congratulate her after the milestone win departing Knoxville at 11pm. 2 AM south of Cincinnati on I75 with no other cars on the road, for some reason the Kentucky State Trooper pulls me over. He approaches the car and asks me where I'm going and where I've been. I tell him of my destination

and asked him if he liked basketball and did he know who Pat Summitt is. Of course this state trooper knows who Pat Summitt and this is Kentucky so coincidentally, he likes basketball. I tell him I just worked the game where Pat Summitt reached 1000 wins, a milestone that may never be duplicated and what a thrill it was to be a part of history. He smiles, asks me some questions about broadcasting and then lets me go! Pat Summitt's name got me out of a speeding ticket in Kentucky!

"The Stare"

Pat is famous for that stare and I've received "the stare" but not on the basketball court. Let the record show that Pat Summitt and Billie Moore never beat me and Mickie "Golf Consigliore" DeMoss on the golf course. Our record is 8-0. Playing one afternoon around the Hall of Fame festivities, Pat and I are on the same team for the final 6 holes. We arrive at the 18th hole and I have a 22 foot, slight downhill, left to right break. It is a difficult putt to win the match. I'm studying the putt like a pro from every angle, listening to the heckling from the opposition. Pat clears her throat, looks at me and says with the stare, "UH, YOU WILL MAKE THIS PUTT." Counting my blessings I didn't let her down. However, the pressure to perform was certainly unnerving from "the stare."

"The Dean"

Dean Smith is an iconic name like Pat. Both have been duplicated and studied as two of the best teachers in basketball. The day I met Coach Smith was ironically the same day Pat was going to win game #880 and pass this legend. I was working in Chapel Hill 1st and 2nd round for ESPN. I walked into his unassuming office with the slanted roof and no window in the building that bears his name under the guise of not discussing the record. We visited about golf, the game in general, personalities on the women's side that he was curious about and he autographed several pieces of memorabilia for my boys. When I got ready to leave, he wanted to discuss Pat and how proud he was she had accomplished so much and what she meant to young women. It was a very poignant and respectful moment in our game for me.

"The Ride"

The day after my Coach, Kay Yow lost her battle with cancer Pat called me because she knew how much I loved my coach. She asked me where I was and how I was getting to the funeral. I told her since the funeral was on a Friday and I would be in Nashville on that Thursday; I would find a flight and get to Raleigh Friday morning. She said no, I would drive from Nashville to Knoxville and ride with her on her private plane to make sure I could attend. It was coincidence that I was in Nashville and able to get to Knoxville, but she would have brought the plane to me if necessary.