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## The Best Seat in the House

By Lou Fancher



Dick Callahan Photo Lou Fancher

He felt "called" to self-employment and today, is the proud founder and owner of Kosich & Callahan, a Lafayette insurance company in operation since 1981.

As a boss, Callahan describes himself as "fair, honest, truthful...well, I'm a regular boy scout." He pauses, sweeping a non-existent crumb off the kitchen table, then throws a change-up, adding, "Demanding too. I think I set the bar too high for some people." Explaining the discrepancy, he's emphatic: "When your ship doesn't come in, you swim out to get it." The swim-or-swim philosophy behind the statement is both boy scout and hard-driving. Individual courage in pursuit of team excellence is Callahan's trademark. Anything less, isn't worth a mention.

Callahan does have a lot to say about the Warrior's recent headline news. "I think it's fabulous," he says, "it will energize the entire community." Praising the new owners for "knowing what it takes to bring something to the public," he points to the main reason for his faith in the franchise's future: "They have the finest fan base in sports." Why finest? "Because they keep coming back for an unrequited love."

And there you have what makes Callahan the perfect voice for sports. Call him unafraid, colorful, opinionated, or even over-the-top: Callahan speaks the beat that is at the heart of athletics.

His six year stint with the Oakland A's is a slice of heaven. "I work with a marvelous, marvelous group of people," he says, "It's my oasis." Hired to sit in for Roy Steele, the A's official stadium announcer since 1968, Callahan is realistic: "If I was trying to be Roy Steele, there'd be pressure, but I'm not trying to replace him. I'm just keeping the chair warm for him." Even so, he cares deeply about the team. "I'd love to see them stay in Oakland," he says. He even has some indirect advice for the management: "It seems like the A's are always reinventing themselves. But fans like to tie to a few players and stick with them."

Braden's perfect game was nerve-wracking for Callahan. "I knew in the sixth inning-oooh, we really have something here," he remembers. As his excitement rose, his concern about errors intensified. If he announced the wrong player, even if he then corrected himself, would it throw Braden off?

Dick Callahan likes to say he has the best seat in the house, but from where the rest of us stand-sit, rather-the best seat is actually the one right next to Dick Callahan.

A Moraga resident for 35 years, Callahan has been the public-address voice of basketball (Warriors and Saint Mary's College), football (Cal), and baseball (Oakland A's). When he settles in for an interview, note-taking becomes a competitive sport.

His voice-golden, with a touch of gravel and running like an Indy 500 dream machine-is mesmerizing. Two hours and ten pages of scribbles later, it's time to hit the showers and get a massage.

Except that Callahan is just getting revved. His fast-talking enthusiasm never burns out: it only adds heat to the delivery. Touching on everything from religion to the greats in professional ball, he's a living museum of Bay Area history.

Growing up in Pennsylvania, Callahan played basketball and went on to college in Kitchner, Ontario. Originally headed for the priesthood, he was steered off-course (and kept on-court) by a valued spiritual advisor. "He told me, 'If a doubt persists, listen to the doubt,'" Callahan says. He laughs, admitting he would have had "a little trouble" fitting into the confines of the clergy. "I think the leadership is a total question mark," he says, "They don't police their problems, they just hide them." Despite his blunt assessment of church leaders, he attends mass, if only irregularly, and hasn't dropped his rosary bead traditions.

The insurance industry became Callahan's life after college. "Well, my dad was in it," he offers, as if genetics were involved. Leadership enters the picture again, prompting a second confession: "As an employee, I drove the bosses nuts-because I wouldn't toe the line."

Fortunately, Callahan is meticulous when it comes to preparation. "A good announcer does homework," he says. He studies the MLB rosters before every game, checking pronunciation with radio announcers and players. "Matt Halliday thanked me-he even knew my name and bothered to thank me," he says, sounding more like an awestruck fan than a seasoned professional.

Callahan, at 69, could hang up his headphones and stretch out poolside. Instead, he's prepping for tonight's game, fielding phone calls and final questions with easy dexterity. There's just enough time for one last memory.

"I remember a reporter asking Larry Bird about an important game he'd just won. He was asking Bird if the win was due to extra effort that night. Bird turned to him and said, 'We play hard every night. That's the Celtic tradition.'" Callahan pauses, nodding meaningfully at the notebook on the table in front of him. "I was standing right there, and that reporter didn't even write that down! The perfect quote!"

Moments later, with Bird's words duly noted, Callahan nods again, this time, approvingly. "Listen," he adds, almost paternal in his effort to guide and instruct a departing visitor, "I've made mistakes. Every pencil I picked up had an eraser on it, and that was a good thing, know what I mean?" His delivery is kind, his words slowing to a gentle pace for the first time.

And then, still brimming with untold stories, he closes the gate, on his way to another game. Much like Bird, Callahan plays hard, every night.

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