

Vasgersian to team up with Ventura

by Cecil Conoley
Knight-Ridder Newspapers
December 04, 2000

Matt Vasgersian remembers his reaction when he first heard the World Wrestling Federation and NBC had combined forces to form a new professional football league. The 1985 Campolindo High School graduate was in Los Angeles at the time, preparing to host another episode of FOX Sports Net's "Sports Geniuses" game show.

"It was tape day. We were at a writers meeting. When we saw the announcement on television, we all kind of rolled our eyes," Vasgersian said. "Then someone in the room yelled at the top of their lungs, 'Vasgersian will be the new announcer.' We all laughed."

Vasgersian wasn't rolling his eyes Nov. 21 when he was hired by NBC as the play-by-play man for NFL telecasts. The eight-team league, which includes the San Francisco Demons, kicks off in February.

Play-by-play work is nothing new for Vasgersian, 33, who has been the television voice of the Milwaukee Brewers the past four years, but he has no football experience.

With the NFL, that might not matter.

"First of all, they made it clear they didn't want a guy who had been formally trained in football broadcasting," he said. "They wanted someone who would treat it differently. I'm not the only guy who can do it the way they wanted it presented. My style is that I'm not traditional in anything I do."

In a break with tradition similar to ABC's hiring of Dennis Miller for "Monday Night Football," NBC went with a celebrity as its NFL analyst and will have Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, the former professional wrestler, in the booth along with Vasgersian.

Ventura is accustomed to public speaking as a politician, but it remains to be seen what he can bring to a football telecast as an analyst. That doesn't worry Vasgersian.

"It's not a concern at all. I don't care what kind of football he brings to the broadcast; he's a personality," Vasgersian said. "He can be the guy people write about on Monday morning. He can be the guy people fire off angry letters to over the content matter."

Vasgersian has had to deal with an

inexperienced sidekick as host of the "Tough Man World Championships" on the FX cable network. His partner is none other than Hall of Fame linebacker Lawrence Taylor.

"He's pretty unrefined, but it's good training for a play-by-play guy," Vasgersian said. "He's one of the funniest guys I've ever been around in my life. There's a difference between funny stuff you can use on the air and funny stuff you can't get away with. It's my job as the play-by-play guy to bring out his funny side without going too far."

If Ventura turns out to be a funny guy, that will affect how Vasgersian approaches an NFL telecast. "If the analyst is the dynamic, the play-by-play guy has to be more of an X's and O's guy, a straight-laced factual guy," he said. "The play-by-play guy and the analyst can't be of the same style."

Vasgersian's off-the-wall style helped earn him jobs on "Sports Geniuses" and "Tough Man," but he wants to be taken seriously as a broadcaster.

"I actually think about that quite a bit. I don't want to become a cartoon character," Vasgersian said. "You have to be true to the person you are, instead of being true to what you think will make you more money. I can do the goofy thing, but for seven months of the year I am a major-league play-by-play broadcaster."

"This is an opportunity to try something different and fun, regardless if it helps me long-term in my career. It can be fun and lucrative in the sense that I can enjoy it. This job's not for everybody, but it's perfect for me."

PINCH HITTER: Roxy Bernstein was shopping at the mall with his girlfriend Saturday afternoon when he received the news that Sharks radio play-by-play man Dan Rusanowsky had been involved in a car accident and would not be able to work that night.

Bernstein, who calls Cal basketball games on KABL (960-AM), came to the rescue. While he plays hockey and has an avid interest in the sport, he had never called a hockey game on radio.

"I was thankful for the opportunity, and I'm glad I was the first guy they thought of, but I know why I got it. It was tough because Dan's a friend. He's pretty beat up," said Bernstein, who will fill in for Rusanowsky, who had never missed a Sharks game in the team's history, while he recovers from his injuries.

A new day for USOC: Woman wins top post

by Alan Abrahamson
Los Angeles Times
December 03, 2000

WASHINGTON - In a historic first for one of America's most traditional institutions, Arizona businesswoman Sandra Baldwin was elected Sunday as chair of the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Under the 115-member USOC board of director's complicated weighted voting system, Baldwin defeated Boston attorney Paul George, 108-96. She will serve as USOC chair until 2004.

Baldwin, 61, is the first woman in the USOC's 106-year history to hold the top rung in its complex organizational structure. Her election, Baldwin said immediately after the votes were tabulated, is a "very, very positive statement to come out of an organization that has been considered very, very conservative."

George, 59, a study in class in defeat, said he was "very proud we have opened up to diversity and have a woman in the role. I think it's a great step forward."

Baldwin's resume and reputation

are formidable: mother of two, grandmother of six. Real estate executive. Holder of a Ph.D. in English (her thesis was entitled, "Neoclassical Background of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Aesthetics"). Longtime USOC official acclaimed for her knowledge of its structure and widely perceived as bold, decisive and a quick study.

"She spun stories Sunday of the thrill of being in the arena in 1980 when the U.S. hockey team beat the Russians. She also recounted her service as the first female president of USA Swimming, in the mid-1980s, and recalled how when the votes were being counted then someone said to her, 'I don't know if swimming is ready for a woman.'"

"I don't know either," she recalled saying. "But they're ready for me." She paused, then - speaking of the USOC - added: "I don't know if this organization is ready for a woman. But I think this organization is more ready than swimming was."

Later Sunday, George, who served as chief of the U.S. delegation at the 1998 Nagano Winter Games, was re-elected to a vice chair.

I-ran away with the ball



WASHINGTON POST PHOTO BY JOHN WARD ANDERSON
Says Gary LeMoine, an American who is coaching Iran's national basketball team (shown with ball), "This job is bigger than basketball. ... I've been hardworking and honest and fair with my players, to demonstrate what's good about America. And maybe in some way that can eventually help open a dialogue between the governments."

Daredevil jumpers get their day on W. Va. bridge

by Candus Thomson
The Baltimore Sun
December 05, 2000

FAYETTEVILLE, W. Va. - Eight seconds.

That's the time it takes to get from the deck of the New River Gorge Bridge to the river 876 feet below.

A step out into space, the roar of wind in your ears as your body picks up speed, the smear of scenery screaming by, the dark blue water are all you can see.

Eight seconds. Speedier than a drag race, but not quite terminal velocity, the speed the laws of physics say is as fast as you can go.

Except that at some point between seconds one and six, you fling a piece of nylon in the air, an offering to the gods of gravity. It catches the wind, billows and yanks open a canopy that lowers you, still alive, to the ground. Except when it doesn't.

Three hundred people showed up on the bridge outside Fayetteville this day to jump, count and land. Most consider themselves adventurers who have come to grips with that most vexing question of moms everywhere: "If everyone else jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?"

Almost three-quarters of those taking the leap of faith this day are first-timers in the extreme sport known as BASE jumping - parachuting from a fixed point, such as the World Trade Center or a broadcast tower, rather than a plane.

Outlaws almost everywhere, these daredevil jumpers get one day, sanctioned by the West Virginia Legislature, to step off the second-highest bridge in the country and take what comes.

The annual event, known as Bridge Day, punches the S-ticket of BASE jumpers seeking to claim each of the acronym's four letters: Building, Antennae, Span and Earth.

The event draws 200,000 specta-

tors, folks who gladly pump almost \$1.5 million into local hotels, restaurants and souvenir stands for a chance to see thrilling acts of derring-do. Or, perhaps, a splat.

"Sure there are (jerks) here who hope to sell their home movies of my death to 'America's Most Gruesome Videos,'" snarls a tattooed, pierced, leather-clad jumper named Max, who, like many here, won't further identify himself because of some "unfinished business" with legal authorities.

"But you know what I say to them? Huh? 'I say, 'Have a nice day!'' Max throws back his head and laughs. Six hours.

By the virtue of the power vested in them, West Virginia state lawmakers in 1990 set aside one-quarter of the third Saturday each October for jumpers to jump and rappellers to rappel from the 3,030-foot-long bridge spanning the New River Gorge.

The window of opportunity begins promptly at 9 a.m. and closes precisely at 3 p.m. Armed officers of the law are the official timekeepers.

There are other rules, too. No bungee jumping (too hard to control). A mandatory check of parachutes and harnesses by expert jumpers. And the state insists that each jumper carry a photo ID; that makes it easier for au-

thorities to tidy up if a dive goes awry.

Like patrons in line at a deli counter, each parachuter gets a number for the first leap of the day. With 300 jumpers and only six hours, organizers are anxious to make sure everyone gets



in at least one plummet. Some make as many as four.

Spectators, called "whuffos" by jumpers (short for the No. 1 question they ask: "Whuffo you jump outta that airplane?"), munch fried dough and pizza, snap photos and speculate as to the participants' sanity.

Jumpers, who defy any demographic pigeon-holing, wear T-shirts touting a hometown saloon, sleek Spandex suits or plain old jeans and sneakers. Some wear costumes. "Superman" answers questions about his air-worthiness by saying, "Why don't you stick around and see?"

To stack the time, they peer over the

side of the bridge to gauge the size of the bull's-eye target area in a rocky landing along the river bank. From here, it looks to be about the size of a grape. The water itself, where many will land rather than risk relocating their hips near their ears, is crowded with more whuffos in inflatable boats.

All the jumpers seem to know that in the 21 years since the bridge opened, three people have died doing just what they're about to do. If they don't know, someone on line tells them.

"It happens," Bridge Day organizer Harry Parker says of the fatalities. "What are you going to do?"

There is tension in the waiting. Everyone is dealing with what is delicately called "the pucker factor."

Recognizing this, organizers have thoughtfully placed a large portapotty at the foot of the jumping platform for any last-minute business.

Some waiting jumpers fall silent, an invisible "go away" sign hung from the cocoon they've withdrawn into. But the vast majority tell stories - lots of them - to each other, to reporters, to anyone who will listen.

Will this be the last story they tell? Is this the way colleagues and strangers will remember them? They are taking no chances.

Susie Hanks is 48, a single mother of four from Orlando, Fla., who took up skydiving more than 20 years ago to bolster her self-esteem, and wound up giving her kids neighborhood bragging rights.

When kids teased her youngsters about her stay-at-home status and later her divorce, they had no comeback, she says. Now they do: "Our mom is a jumpmaster. Our mom has taught 2,000 people to skydive. Our mom bakes great chocolate chip cookies. What does your mom do?"

BASE jumping makes her nervous, Hanks admits. "I prefer being at least at 10,000 feet," she says. "Of course it bothers you. I'd wonder about any-

Good, bad and ugly in college football

by Mike Huguenin
Knight-Ridder Tribune
November 30, 2000

This season's five biggest surprises:

Auburn: No one expected Tommy Tuberville to lead the Tigers to the SEC West title. Yes, Alabama and Mississippi weren't as good as expected, but Tuberville and his staff were there to help their team fill the void. Junior college transfer RB Rudi Johnson was the catalyst for the offensive improvement, and a lot of young guys came through on defense.

Northwestern: That this team was one win from the Rose Bowl says a lot for Coach Randy Walker. Most expected the Wildcats to finish at or near the bottom of the Big Ten. Instead, they used an ultra-productive headed by TB Damien Anderson to get to eight victories despite a bad defense.

Oklahoma: Folks expected the Sooners to win eight or nine. But a possible national title awaits in Coach Bob Stoops' second season. QB Josh Heupel is a perfect fit for the offense, the defense is opportunistic and OU is physically tougher than people think.

Oregon State: The Beavers deserve a BCS bid. Will they get one? Even if they don't, this has been a season to remember in Corvallis, as the Beavers will be going bowling in back-to-back seasons for the first time ever. RB Ken Simonton is the best player you've never heard of, the defense is tough and the secondary is tremendous. The big question now is how long Coach Dennis Erickson stays around.

South Carolina: The Gamecocks entered the season with a 21-game losing streak. They could end this season in a New Year's Day game.

Honorable mention: Georgia Tech, Iowa State, Louisville, LSU, North Carolina State, Notre Dame, San Jose State, UAB, UTEP, Western Michigan.

This season's five biggest disappointments:

Alabama: The Tide went into the season with national-title hopes. It exits the season with a 4-7 record and without a coach. The offense was abysmal. There's a ton of talent in Tuscaloosa - um, Tuscaloosa - and it was wasted this season. This team is one of the biggest disappointments nationally in the past 10 years.

Georgia: This is not a lost season, by any means. With a victory today over Georgia Tech, the Bulldogs will finish 8-3. But a Music City Bowl bid likely awaits, and that's not good enough for a season that was supposed to end on New Year's Day. SEC East rivals Florida and Tennessee were down a bit this season, but the Bulldogs couldn't capitalize. Yes, Georgia finally beat Tennessee, but that win was erased by losses to South Carolina and Auburn. An QB Quincy Carter seemingly has regressed the past two seasons.

Illinois: The Illini had nine starters back from a high-powered offense that led them to a bowl rout of Virginia last season, and that offense was supposed to make up for an iffy defense. Instead, the season went downhill after some questionable officiating cost the Illini a possible victory over Michigan. The Illini went into that game 3-0; they finished 5-6.

USC: The Trojans were expected to contend for the Pac-10 title; instead, they're finishing in a three-way tie for last. The defense, which was supposed to be strong, can't stop good teams. And the offense needs a running game. A coaching change appears imminent.

Wisconsin: The Badgers were a trendy pick to win the Big Ten and possibly contend for the national title. But a messy off-field problem regarding shoes, a defense that was a sieve and an offense that couldn't throw the ball added up to a Sun Bowl bid.

Dishonorable mention: BYU, Hawaii, Houston, Mississippi, Navy, Penn State, Texas, UCLA, Utah.

Avalanche is No. 1

by Jim Hodges
Los Angeles Times
December 04, 2000

The Los Angeles Times' NHL rankings (records through Sunday's games):

- Colorado (19-4-3-0). And just got Forsberg back.
- St. Louis (17-4-3-0). Turgeon benched for big rally vs. Leafs.
- San Jose (15-5-3-0). Nolan: 11 points in six games.
- Ottawa (15-7-4-0). Think Ducks would like Latime back?
- New Jersey (12-8-5-0). Why can't Devils beat Islanders?
- Detroit (16-9-1-2). Stevie Y. close to returning.
- Dallas (14-7-3-1). Hull to Hitchcock: Leave Modano alone.
- Toronto (14-7-3-2). Rebounds from shocking loss to Blues.
- Vancouver (14-8-3-2). 10-1-2 when Canucks score first.
- Edmonton (14-11-4-0). Expected slide is starting.
- Buffalo (13-8-2-1). Peca nearing end of holdout?
- Phoenix (13-8-6-0). Lemieux should help offense.
- Pittsburgh (12-9-3-1). Four-point weekend ends Jagr's slump.
- N.Y. Rangers (13-14-0-0). Richter struggling in net.
- Los Angeles (12-9-6-0). Which team, 1-3-2 or 6-0-2?
- Philadelphia (11-11-4-0). Special teams not special.
- Nashville (10-10-5-1). Still hanging around .500.
- Anaheim (9-12-4-3). Hebert's return could help/hurt.
- Washington (9-10-6-1). If only they could stay home.
- Chicago (10-13-2-2). If only they could stay on road.
- Carolina (10-11-3-1). With Irbe, anything is possible.
- N.Y. Islanders (7-12-4-2). Vanbiesbrouck bedevils New Jersey.
- Tampa Bay (9-12-2-2). Rookie Richards is impressive.
- Montreal (9-15-3-0). 2-0-2 typical coach-change bounce.
- Boston (8-13-3-2). Can't play together.
- Minnesota (7-15-4-1). Tough 0-3 trip.
- Atlanta (7-10-6-1). Some unimpressive victories.
- Calgary (6-12-6-4). V. Bure: three goals in 27 games.
- Columbus (7-18-1-1). Eight consecutive losses.
- Florida (5-11-4-4). Recent one-for-54 powerless play.