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## Local man lends voice to MSU

By: Jason Michael, Headliner News

**To most, Ozark resident Steve Casson was living the dream. An avid hockey fan, Casson was living in sunny Los Angeles, working for his hometown hockey team, the Los Angeles Kings.**

He was rubbing elbows with some of the biggest names in the sports world, including Mike Keenana and Bobby Hull, and was fulfilling a dream of hosting his own weekend radio show.

Life was good for Casson. But then something happened that took him out of California and brought him to Christian County for good.

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"I guess it was burnout," he said. "I was working the Kings, the (Anaheim Mighty) Ducks, and the (Long Beach) Ice Dogs. I had a day job from seven until four and a weekend radio show. Looking back, I thought how could I ever have a relationship."

But it was one relationship with a friend in Branson that brought Casson to the Midwest. After working for the Kings from 1985-1991, and then the National Hockey League after that, Casson came out to visit a friend in November of 1998.

"I came out to visit and that was the year when (they) had really nice weather," he said. "It was 70 degrees and I thought 'I could handle this. How much worse could it get?'"

So Casson had his friend find him a radio gig in Branson and the Los Angeles native made the trip to Missouri in the spring of 1999. It was then he had his first taste of midwest weather.

"When I came out in March, I experienced a week of all the different weather you can experience: rain, sleet, snow, sun," he said.

But the elements were not the only thing that was unexpected in Casson's life. Casson began working at KRZK/KOMC-FM in May of 1999, handling football color commentary. But the station shut down and Casson moved on to KTTS-FM in Springfield as a news reporter and then as a store designer in the corporate office of Big Bass Pro Shops. Casson's thirst for sports remained unquenched without a sport radio gig, so he attempted to remedy the situation. And what he came up with is something that has begun to succeed beyond his wildest dreams.

"Nobody covered sports here," Casson said. "Jock (98.7-FM) just came in, did their job and then they were done. But we wanted to create something where we would come in, provide a service, and at least be halfway decent."

This service is known as WebSportsRadio.com, an online sports radio Web site created by Casson and longtime friend Dan Lee, a former Sports Editor for the Stone County Gazette and the voice of Reeds Spring High School football. Initially, the duo's goal was to broadcast high school football games, but something much bigger came along in 2005.

"We approached (Missouri State University) and made a pitch to them mutually based on hockey," Casson said. "Even though they had a halfway decent season a year ago, they weren't drawing many people. I told them I was starting a company and we would broadcast football games on the internet."

So Missouri State became a part of WebSports Radio and Casson and Lee became the voice of Missouri State hockey.

"They understand we know hockey and they respect us," Casson said. "We're the only broadcast team in southwest Missouri that knows hockey and we have an exclusive contract. We're establishing this partnership with Missouri state and, at the same time, we promote them."

But not everything went according to plan in the beginning. Initial start up costs for Casson and Lee were close to nine thousand dollars and the streaming company for the Web site resulted in a two-and-a-half minute delay on the internet.

"The signal was getting shot out to Germany," Casson said. "So we dumped them and our new server is in Texas. Our motto is to do it right or don't do it at all."

And the pair have been doing it right ever since. The two friends, who have been broadcast partners for five years, handle all responsibilities for the Web site and broadcast. Casson produces the show on site and commercials are read on the spot. The two conduct on-ice interviews, call the action and even take photos during the game. In addition, the duo, stationed at center ice, uses a unique play-by-play technique in which one broadcaster calls the action on one side of the red line and the other takes over when the action crosses over to the other end of the rink.

"People can't believe it's a two-person operation," Casson said. "Dan takes one side of the ice and I take the other side of the ice. When we do play-by-play, people listen and say 'How do you guys know when to hand off?'. We just do. We've been teamed together for five years."

Casson and Lee also recently agreed to a deal with the Ozark Generals to provide play-by-play for a number of games in the upcoming season. The pair are also looking to partner with more area high schools to provide coverage for football games. They are also implementing a mini-FM transmitter into the MSU hockey arena next season so fans at the game can listen to a live broadcast with headphones. And the Web site continues to boom. During the American Collegiate Hockey Association playoffs, WebSportsRadio.com received a daily hit total of 3,300 visitors.

And Casson expects things to only get better.