

Jim Irwin



Hall of Fame announcer Jim Irwin, Newsradio 620 WTMJ's longtime play-by-play voice of the Green Bay Packers, Milwaukee Bucks and Wisconsin Badgers, has passed away. Irwin died Sunday, January 22, 2012, after a battle with kidney cancer after he recently received hospice care at his home in Southern California.

"He was part of the fabric of our stations and our community for so many years. He was a colleague, a friend and always a consummate professional," said Steve Wexler, the executive vice president of Journal Broadcast Group.

Irwin came to Newsradio 620 WTMJ and TODAY'S TMJ4 in 1969 after covering sports on television at WLUK-TV in Green Bay. His first assignment was giving color commentary on 620WTMJ's Packers Radio Network broadcasts with Ted Moore. After Moore departed to become the radio voice of the Baltimore Colts in 1970, Irwin worked with Gary Bender, who eventually became a voice of the NFL, NBA, NCAA football/basketball and the Olympics on ABC and CBS Sports. When Bender left in 1975, Irwin slid over to the play-by-play microphone, initially working with color commentator Lionel Aldridge, a former Packers defensive end, TODAY'S TMJ4 sports anchor and NBC Sports commentator. Irwin wouldn't give up that job for 24 years, working with former Packers wide receiver Max McGee for the final 20 of those seasons.

Irwin and McGee became part of a three-word phrase that his successor on the Packers network, Wayne Larrivee, understood well: " 'Jim and Max,' whom people still remember as if they had done the game Sunday. I think it's a tremendous tradition...these guys are Hall of Famers," said Larrivee in a 2005 Newsradio 620 WTMJ conversation with Irwin and Moore - now 52 years of Packers Radio Network voices in one discussion - along with Newsradio 620 WTMJ's Dennis Krause. The tradition became so entrenched that many Packers fans would turn down the volume on their television sets and turn on 620WTMJ or their Packers Radio Network affiliate and listen to Jim and Max's calls. Former Packers center Larry McCarren joined Irwin and McGee on Packers broadcasts from 1995-98 before becoming the sole color commentator with current Newsradio 620 WTMJ Voice of the Packers Wayne Larrivee.

In his illustrious career, Irwin earned Wisconsin Sportscaster of the Year 10 times, while being named to the Packers Hall of Fame and Wisconsin Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame. Irwin had a number of other roles as well at 620WTMJ and TODAY'S TMJ4. He called Milwaukee Bucks basketball games on Newsradio 620 WTMJ from 1979-1993, teaming with analyst Jon McGlocklin during many of those years. Irwin was present for 12 consecutive playoff appearances and three runs to the Eastern Conference Finals from 1980-91. He also worked with Bender and former Badgers quarterback Ron Vanderkelen on Wisconsin football from 1969-90, while doing play-by-play on Badgers basketball during that time as well. Irwin called Milwaukee Brewers games during the 1970's and 1980's on Newsradio 620 WTMJ as a fill-in voice for Bob Uecker when the longtime Voice of the Brewers had national television responsibilities. Radio listeners also heard Irwin's voice at the 15 and 45 minute marks of every hour during "Wisconsin's Morning News," with Irwin's famous "Viewpoint" at 7:45.

Irwin had a long television career as well, serving TODAY'S TMJ4 during the 1970's. After Irwin's retirement from WTMJ in 1999, he moved near San Diego with his beloved wife Gloria, but continued to serve Newsradio 620 WTMJ as a sports analyst during "Wisconsin's Morning News." He also spent a lot of his time in retirement playing golf with longtime friend and TODAY'S TMJ4 sports anchor Hank Stoddard. In recent years, Irwin discovered he had kidney cancer.

Irwin will most be remembered for calling Packers games longer than any other announcer, and for how his voice described the Packers' journey from also-rans to the NFL's elite. When asked about how he would rate his life on a scale of 1-10, Irwin answered, "Is there a 12 or a 14?"

(Editor's Note: Jim Irwin was inducted into the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame in 1994)

- Taken in part from the 1/23/2012 article at todaystmj4.com (Jay Sorgi)