



Jim Erickson (left) and Lou Nanne in the booth at the state tournament, a place Nanne has been every March for the past 60 years.

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BROADCASTING ICON: SWEET LOU

LOU NANNE CALLS IT A CAREER AFTER 60 YEARS OF BROADCASTING THE STATE TOURNAMENT



By Heather Rule

Not much can compare to a full Xcel Energy Center for semifinal Friday, with 18,000-plus fans settled in for high school hockey on a Friday night. Lou Nanne tells people about it, and he said they can't believe it.

"But that's the treasure of Minnesota," Nanne said.

Another treasure of Minnesota? Lou Nanne, who this March is set to call his final boys' high school hockey tournament television

broadcast after 60 years. Say it ain't so, Sweet Lou from the Soo.

Sixty years is the perfect number to hang up his headset, said Nanne, a native of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and Minnesota hockey legend.

"I've done it for all those years, and I just thought that I've enjoyed it, I still like it, I'm still excited about it, but that's the way you'd like to leave it," Nanne said. "You don't want to stay when you don't want to be there. And you don't want to stay there when they don't want you to be there.

"It's just time to make a change."

Nanne said he feels good about the timing of stepping away from the microphone. He took his time thinking about the decision, too. Nearly a year, in fact, going back to the quarterfinals of last year's tournament. Driving home from the arena as time ticked toward midnight, with snow falling, Nanne's car connected with what he called a sinkhole; "It was bigger than a pothole." He ended up driving about 12 miles on a flat tire. That's what first got him thinking it might be time to step away from the tournament.

Nanne's been the consistent voice in the booth for decades, and he's worked with many play-by-play partners over the years, including Frank Boyle, Wally Shaver, Chris Cuthbert and Jim Erickson. This year is Erickson's 10th tournament working with Nanne. It's a working relationship that was a big thrill for Erickson, though also "somewhat intimidating," said Erickson, who grew up watching the tournaments.

Nanne also worked with Mark Rosen, Doug Woog, Herb Brooks, Tom Hanneman and Ralph John Fritz, among others, when the tournament was on WCCO in the 1980s.

GETTING STARTED

After he graduated from the University of Minnesota, Nanne's broadcasting started with high school hockey games on the radio before the local channel 11, WTCN, station called him that winter to broadcast some high school games as a color analyst.

The rest is history.

Early on, Nanne did interviews, analysis and intermission coverage. He even used a wireless mic, new technology, to interview with the Zamboni driver at the St. Paul Civic Center. He didn't dare take the elevator at the arena, so he went up and down the stairs "about 52 times at the Civic Center" to complete all the coverage.

"I did everything that they do now except broadcast the game," Nanne said. "So, all the stuff you see done on the desk, all the stuff in

between periods, I completely filled all that time."

In more recent years, Nanne settled into his role as the color analyst. Each tournament is different with different teams, and Nanne always does his homework. The television stats crew provides line charts for the broadcasters, but Nanne makes his own, according to Erickson, adding that Nanne uses manilla folders, writing down the lines to help him prepare.

'LOU IS THERE TO TEACH US'

Up until about three years ago, he watched a lot of high school games throughout the season to get a feel for teams and players. He also prepares with a lot of reading on teams, plus chats with coaches.

"He knew the teams, he knew the players, he knew the strengths and weaknesses," Rosen said. "He'd have it down. It doesn't happen by accident when you're that good at what you do for so many years.

"I think he made it really easy for the fans or just the casual hockey fans who are just tuning into the tournament, that everybody wanted to watch all the time and expected Louie to be that guiding light of information."

He would also never criticize a player for lack of ability; he knew the magnitude of the moment for the high school kids, Rosen said. Erickson thinks Nanne realizes that the state hockey tournament might be the most hockey some viewers watch all year.

"He sees things that other people don't see," Erickson said. "And he's able to also analyze a play and describe it so people can understand it, doesn't use a lot of technical jargon."

Nanne's always tried to get better at his craft in the booth, giving the viewers what they wanted. One thing he doesn't do is get too technical and dive deep into statistics. He doesn't want to use terminology that a hockey coach might use with his hockey team.

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