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Home Advantage

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Home Advantage



Launching his sports-reporting career in college, Stew Salowitz '76 continues to track the pulse of Titan athletics.

Salowitz charts the action for the Titan basketball women's 72-58 win over North Park at the Shirk Center. The game was held in conjunction with IWU's Pink Zone fundraiser promoting breast-cancer awareness.

If you're curious how someone grows up to become a university director of sports information, try looking in his basement.

That's where Stew Salowitz, clearing out some dusty shelves, uncovered scrapbooks he made in grade school documenting two seasons of Illinois State basketball. In page margins, next to programs and newspaper clippings, are his game notes, neatly printed in blue-ballpoint ink. Asterisks mark the many home and away games he watched and studied as a boy.

Over the decades, his affinity for college sports remains undiminished — though his choice of teams has changed. An English major at Illinois Wesleyan, he pursued a radio broadcasting career and then became the Titans' sports information director in 1988, succeeding Ed Alsene, who held the position 23 years before retiring.

"I thought, 'That's a job I'd love to do.'" Salowitz recalls. "It's the only job I ever applied for, and it's just incredible to believe I've now been here longer than Ed. I always thought of him as having been here forever. Now it's me who's been here forever."

Now in his 24th year on the job, Salowitz will be inducted into the Illinois Basketball Hall of Fame on April 28, chosen in the media category by the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association. Illinois Wesleyan's first inductees, back in 1973, included legendary IWU coach Jack Horenberger '36 and longtime *Pantagraph* sports editor Fred Young, Class of 1915. Since then, 23 more alumni have earned the distinction.

"It's fun, it's a nice honor, it's amazing, really," Salowitz says. "I'm going in the same year as people I watched play so many times as a kid, in high school and in college."

Those words, "so many times," may be an understatement. Salowitz has handled media arrangements and statistics for over 600 IWU men's and women's home basketball games. He called hundreds of games, first as a student broadcaster and later as a pro at Bloomington's WJBC. Earlier, because his father was a physician working with Illinois State teams, the boy rode Redbird buses to games. Salowitz may have seen, written about, or shouted into a microphone about every Hall of Fame basketball player in Bloomington, Normal, and environs for the past half-century.

"Both my mom and dad were great sports fans, so I come by it naturally," he says. His family would frequently host athletes for meals "and a couple of kids — athletes, of course — even lived at our house while going to college. Groups would use our garage to build homecoming floats when I was in grade school, so I've been hanging around college kids almost all my life."

Illinois State might have seemed an inevitable choice of college for Salowitz. But in his senior year at Bloomington's Central Catholic High School, he visited IWU "and loved it — loved the smallness of it."

Eventually, he found his way to the Kemp Hall basement studio that was home to Wesleyan's radio station, WESN. Salowitz remembers the clacking noise of the Associated Press machine, "spitting out paper right and left." He read news and did a weekly music show, but his big break was a January "short term" internship his senior year, doing the morning shift at WIHN-FM.

After graduation, he worked briefly at a failing country music radio station. On payday, he says, "you went straight to the bank." His talents as the morning host and play-by-play announcer for the Titans' basketball team got some attention and WJBC Radio in Bloomington came calling in 1977. At the time, WJBC was among the top-rated stations in the country. Salowitz became host of a popular afternoon show.



Salowitz launched his broadcasting career at WESN.

In his first professional job after graduation, he did play-by-play for Titan basketball games.

"My connection with IWU basketball was strong at WJBC, too," he says. He traveled with Coach Dennie Bridges '61 and his teams to broadcast games in Mississippi, Arizona and California, "so got to know those players very well. By the time I started at Wesleyan I was pretty well-acquainted with the athletic department and other key people at the University."

Since taking on Wesleyan's sports-information duties, Salowitz's job has expanded, from 12 to 18 varsity sports.

"The first spring I was at IWU we had nine total track meets, men only and all outdoors," he says. "This year we have 18 meets, men's and women's teams, indoor and outdoor seasons. And it's that way with every sport. We didn't have swimming or women's golf or soccer or cross country when I started."

The success of Wesleyan's athletic program adds to the work, but Salowitz isn't complaining. He's handled media arrangements for 22 NCAA Division III women's basketball tournament games, 17 NCAA Division III

men's basketball tournament games and the 2010 and 2011 NCAA Division III women's basketball championships held at the Shirk Center.

Technology brings new challenges but also greater efficiency and the chance to reach more fans faster. On the road years ago, Salowitz had to find pay phones to call in game results for the next morning's newspaper. Now it's done by computers over the Internet in nanoseconds.

In February, IWU's sports website got 332,316 page views from 19,344 visitors. Salowitz and his student workers are now exploring new ways to connect with Titan fans through social-media sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. "Today we did our first 'iMovie,'" he says about video from a women's basketball game. "Amazing — this morning that video didn't exist, and now it's on the website."

"I guarantee I have learned as much from the students about computer skills as they have from me," he adds.

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When not documenting Titan athletes' achievements, you might find Salowitz in his kitchen testing a new recipe or taking a day trip on his Triumph Bonneville down a country road he hasn't been down before. He goes further when he can — a recent trip was to London — and once a year he makes the pilgrimage to watch his San Francisco Giants play in AT&T Park.

So how does a guy grow up in Normal but leave his heart in San Francisco?

Salowitz needs only three words of explanation.

"Willie Mays, 1962."

The Giants' Mays was the baseball's nearly perfect player — young, strong and fast, a home-run hitter, a base stealer and a center fielder of such range that someone said Mays' glove is where triples go to die. Little Stewart Salowitz, 8 years old, had never seen Mays in real life, not even on television. But he'd read enough to know Willie was his guy.

The devotion was so complete that Salowitz, at age 30 and long removed from his Central Catholic baseball days, went to an "Old Giants" fantasy camp to work out with his boyhood heroes. There he met Mays and discovered him to be "a jovial guy." And in one at-bat there, Salowitz stood in against Hall of Fame pitcher Juan Marichal. He took three balls, then fouled off a pitch before bouncing a ground ball past the pitcher and past second base.

He loved that single. It wasn't much of a hit, "a 25-hopper up the middle." But it wound up in short center, fielded by Willie Mays.

Salowitz is pretty sure he has a picture somewhere. He'll look around next time he's cleaning out his basement.

To read about Stew's Crew, 41 alumni who worked as students for Salowitz, [click here](#).

To visit the Titan Athletic website, [click here](#).