

Sports talk: UWO alumnus anchors Sports Central

by Sheng Lee - Tuesday, June 14, 2011

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Greg Matzek, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus '01, went from being an aspiring sports anchor and radio personality to achieving his dream job in just 10 years.

Today, people recognize Matzek as the sports anchor for Wisconsin's Morning News on WTMJ and co-host of Sports Central with Trenni Kusnierek.

Matzek graduated from UW Oshkosh with a degree in radio-TV- film and a minor in coaching. During his time at Oshkosh, Matzek was council president for Theta Chi fraternity and a radio host at WRST. He was a three-time All-American in track and field and WIAC Scholar Athlete of the year as a senior in 2000.

"Earning that award told me I was able to balance school, athletics and Greek life effectively," Matzek said.

In 2003, he starred in and won the reality TV show "Beg, Borrow & Deal 2" on ESPN. After his TV debut, people began comparing Matzek to celebrities such as Vin Diesel and U.S. World Cup goalie Tim Howard.

"It's actually kind of creepy how much we resemble each other," Matzek said.

In 2009, Matzek appeared on Milwaukee's Hot 100 List as one of the "hotties" of the professional world.

Matzek's interests include live music, tailgating, long weekend trips, cooking, landscaping, making others laugh, hitting three green lights in a row and the smell of freshly cut grass.

Matzek shares his story in his own words:

Who was your favorite UW Oshkosh professor?

I hesitate to slight any of the professors who helped to shape my career path one way or the other, but the professor I connected with the strongest was Ben Jarman. Using the medium of radio, Ben taught me how to paint an incredibly vivid picture for the audience to absorb, a skill that is vital to radio success.

What is your favorite UW Oshkosh memory?

I was pretty diverse in my pursuits at the University. I was involved with the radio-TV-film major, was a repeat All-American for the UWO track and field team and represented Theta Chi Fraternity as the intra-fraternal council president. However, the thing I was most proud of was winning the WIAC Scholar Athlete Award as a senior.

What does your UW Oshkosh education/experience mean to you?

My adult life was shaped by my college experience, plain and simple. Athletics taught me how to push myself beyond my comfort zone in order to be great. It also helped to hone my leadership skills as a team captain.

Greek life helped further develop my social skills and taught me a level of business acumen that I consider to be valuable in my everyday life.

The quality of the radio-TV-film major exceeded my expectations and opened the door to my current career path. Collectively, each of these pursuits taught me the value of teamwork, time management and leadership, and I did it all without taking a single math class.

Do you have any advice for current UW Oshkosh students?

Get after it! The only way you'll know for certain if you're on the right career path is to dig deep and learn as much as you can about growth potential and what a "day in the life of" is like. The best way to do this is through internships and job shadowing. Also, don't be afraid to change paths either during college or afterward. This is your life to live and no one else's.

Landing a job post-college is tricky. An applicant must find a way to stand out from the rest of the applicant pool. The best thing to do is contact a human resource manager at a company and set up an informational interview. It will not only provide some face-to-face interview experience but it also will show that you are interested in finding a job environment that is a mutual fit.

Describe the achievements you are most proud of.

I was hired at the age of 23 by the biggest radio station in Wisconsin to be a producer. It's not what I aspired to be, but I understood that I needed to take my lumps and learn in order to get where I wanted to be.

Every day I worked toward the goal of being a sports anchor/personality and talk show host. Finally, after 10 years as a part-time employee who pulled weekend sports anchor duties along with a full-time marketing job, my dream became a reality and I am now the personality I aspired to be when I started.

Describe your experience on the reality TV show "Beg, Borrow & Deal 2."

Simply put, it was the most unique and interesting experience of my life. It's not often that a person gets to have their every move documented by ESPN for eight weeks. There are too many rules to explain, but the show was an ESPN version of the "Amazing Race." Two teams of four raced from South Beach, Fla., to Mount Rushmore, with no money, food, phone, etc. All we had was our wit, charm, identification and clothes on our back.

Winning the show allowed me to experience some truly great moments. Most notable was being able to walk the red carpet at the ESPY Awards two separate years. Advice: If you ever end up walking the red carpet at any event, make sure it's the slowest walk of your life!

A little inside nugget about the show ... It came about the same time I applied for grad school at the University of Tennessee. I was at a point where I was considering a career change and was accepted to Tennessee's sports management program. Shortly after I was accepted, I learned that I was a finalist for

the show.

In short, I had to choose between grad school and being on a TV show. I ultimately picked the TV show. There are some people who might cringe when they read that, but my decision was calculated. My thoughts were that if I could get into grad school once, I could do it again, but the TV opportunity was a once in a lifetime shot.

I also thought that when I have kids, they'd be able to see me on TV at a time when I was cool, but they wouldn't be able to see what I was like in grad school. Shortly after the show aired, I landed my first on-air sports shift at 620 WTMJ.

What do you enjoy most about your job at WTMJ?

The variety ... within the last week I participated in a 25-mile charity bike ride with listeners, two charity golf tournaments and was in the dugout for the Donald Driver Charity Softball game at Fox Cities Stadium. Because 620 WTMJ is the flagship for all the major sports in the state, there are some outstanding opportunities to build relationships with the coaches, players and front office personnel.

More than anything, I am proud to have been able to break in and have a voice in the marketplace of a very competitive industry. I cherish my role and am humbled by it. I also love connecting with the listeners who make WTMJ a part of their daily routine.

Are there any parts of your job that are challenging?

The schedule can be challenging because radio never stops. Holidays are fair game; it's entirely possible that I will have to work on Thanksgiving and Christmas in a given year.

My role on-air during the week is a split shift. A typical week day for me involves getting up at 4 a.m. to perform my anchor duties. I'm usually back home between 9 and 10 a.m. and try to rest for a short time or hit the gym.

After that, I log back on and see what's popping in the world of sports. If the Brewers are playing a home game, I'll head to the stadium at about 3:45 p.m. and talk to a few players before batting practice. I'll email the interviews back to my producer for use on the evening sports talk show that I do with my partner, Trenni Kusnierek.

It's nice to have a pocket of time in the day to myself, and often times Sports Central is pre-empted by a Brewers or Bucks game, but the split shift can be a grind. It would be much more difficult if I didn't love what I was doing.

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