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**THOSE GUYS HAVE ALL THE FUN**  
INSIDE THE WORLD OF ESPN



EXPANDED WITH  
NEW INTERVIEWS

**JAMES ANDREW MILLER AND TOM SHALES**

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# THOSE GUYS HAVE ALL THE FUN

INSIDE THE WORLD OF ESPN

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JAMES ANDREW MILLER  
AND TOM SHALES



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*For Elizabeth Miller (1959–2010) with love*

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“To love what you do and feel that it matters—how could anything be more fun?”

—*Katharine Graham*

# Introduction

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It is the 27th day of August 2009, and a happy horde has gathered in remote Bristol, Connecticut, to celebrate—with equal parts sentimentality and pride—the thirtieth birthday of a television network. Not many broadcasting companies inspire this level of devotion, but this one is different.

The sun smiles down obligingly on ESPN's sixty-four-acre "campus"—the rolling, semiverdant site on which ESPN's buildings sit and from which its twenty-seven treasured satellite dishes suck signals from the sky, spewing others back into the ionosphere and out through much of the world. The grass all but glows green, something that couldn't have happened thirty years ago, when this place had less in common with a university than with the LaBrea Tar Pits, except that Bristol's primordial ooze was just plain miserable mud.

The thirtieth-birthday festivities are going to be much more understated than celebrations for the twenty-fifth. Then, cars full of ESPN stars motorcaded through Disney World, and even if you couldn't get to Florida, you could probably score one of the 1.3 million bottles of Gatorade produced in a special flavor called "ESPN"—or grab one of 300 million Bud Light cans with ESPN's twenty-fifth anniversary logo printed on the label. In the weeks leading up to the celebration, network nabobs chose what they thought were the top sports moments of the previous twenty-five years and aired a series of specials keyed to the anniversary—all the hoopla climaxing in one of the hottest tickets in the company's history: a blowout at the ESPN Zone restaurant in Times Square.

Because 2009 is turning out to be a brutally cruel recession year, ESPN's president, the unflappable George Bodenheimer, wisely elects to tone things down this time around. In a brief state-of-the-clubhouse speech, he looks to a rosy future before an audience that includes many of the company's senior executives and about fifty members of both old and new media.

So self-confident are the leaders of ESPN at this point in their history that they have even invited the head raccoon of *Deadspin*, the maverick and sometimes mean-spirited blog that has long considered the merciless ongoing examination of ESPN to be one of its public duties.

*Deadspin* editor A. J. Daulerio felt he couldn't handle spending the entire day cozying up to ESPN's big kahunas, so he dispatched "Blazer Girl," the blog's answer to Lois Lane, to cover the event. If Daulerio is hoping she will go all Woodward and Bernstein on ESPN, however, he's going to be disappointed; Blazer Girl goes soft among the ESPN cognoscenti, especially when she gets to pose for a photo with the network's longest-reigning superstar, Chris Berman.

After lunch comes a celebration within the celebration: homage paid to forty-three people who, like Berman, started with ESPN in the first year of its existence—and are still on the payroll as the first decade of a new century ends.

It's part of the mythology of the place that many an ESPN employee doesn't just date the company but marries it. Longevity is the norm. Over the years, occasional employees leave because they don't fit in; some leave because they simply can't take so-called life in lonely Bristol; and still others leave for better pay and more ego stroking elsewhere. Lastly, though there have been notorious examples to the contrary, it usually takes a lot to get fired by ESPN.

Of the forty-three stalwarts being honored with their own stars on the ESPN "Walk of Fame" on this super summer afternoon, Berman, practically the network's avatar, and Bob "The General" Ley

(pronounced Lee), the network's best journalist, are not only the most recognizable ESPN personalities but among the most recognizable guys ever to have a mic pack jab their rear ends. The two soak up the admiring applause of several hundred in the audience—other honorees, ESPN employees and family members, press, and guests.

In a moment that is somehow pure ESPN, Bob Ley looks down at his star and does a double take when he sees “Rob Ley” spelled out in gold lettering, a whammy of a blooper that causes colleague Bill Shanahan, standing next to Ley, to explode in guffaws. Some might consider this a perfect reminder that through the years, ESPN management has never liked its personalities to become big names anyway; big names demand big bucks. They prefer keeping the talent humble.

Bodenheimer handles the officiating with presidential aplomb alongside Sage Steele—born seven years before ESPN was—as his mistress of ceremonies. Bodenheimer had rejected the organizing committee's first suggestion of an emcee and made the outstanding choice of Steele—who represents everything you could ask for in an anchor—himself. Berman and Ley speechify, then join other honorees posing for photos next to their stars and also with Bodenheimer, who on this day seems more benevolently paternalistic than ever.

Then they all adjourn to the ESPN Café and eat cake to commemorate the spectacular growth of the past three decades. ESPN was a funky little seat-of-the-pants operation in 1979 when it started, in a town so dull that employees worked eighteen-hour days to keep from dying of boredom outside. ESPN now encompasses six domestic U.S. cable networks, forty-six international networks, ESPN radio in North America and syndicated radio in eleven other far-flung countries, plus online operations, broadband, magazines, books, interactive media, wireless, CDs and DVDs, video games, and restaurants, all helping to pump coverage of more than sixty-five different sports into television sets, computers, and mobile phones in more than two hundred fifty countries.

Once a bastard stepchild filed, along with “almond groves,” under “other” among the holdings of Getty Oil, ESPN is now the most important component of the Disney empire, worth more than the entire National Football League, worth more than the NBA, MLB, and the NHL put together.

This book pursues the mystery of ESPN's rise to stratospheric heights from subterranean depths. It reveals how a crazy idea grew into one of the most successful media enterprises of all time.

“Those Guys Have All the Fun.” The men and women you will meet in these pages spend their days and nights talking and thinking about sports. Hard as they work, ESPNers toil in an environment that most folks would consider pure pleasure. And when they aren't working, ESPNers still have all the fun, or at least most of it. At ESPN, partying is a varsity sport.

What follows is not the history but *the story* of ESPN. It would take a dozen or more weighty volumes to provide an all-encompassing account of ESPN's innumerable hours of nonstop broadcasting through more than thirty sports-saturated years. More time and space would be needed to fully chronicle the many thousands who have come and gone—or come and stayed—over the decade. Still, many of those who have entered ESPN's orbit are here, and here in their own words. To write this book, over five hundred fifty people were interviewed, and the words you read are their own. In some instances, their quotes have been cleaned up (removing, for example, the “umms” and “uhs” that accompany most conversation); and certain discussions for the sake of clarity and exposition have been moved or compacted. But otherwise, what you read is precisely as it was told to us.

One thing that can be stated from the start is that the odds of ESPN happening just the way it did are somewhere in the neighborhood of a zillion to one. All sports, all the time—24/7 and 365 days a year? When the notion was hatched back in 1978, it was liberally ridiculed—even though logic and precedent tell us that eventually, somehow and somewhere, someone would have looked at the

tremendous growth of sports and sporting events in the United States, noticed the morphing of athletes into superstar celebrities, taken stock of the wide-open explosion in the number of potential cable networks, and realized that tens, even *hundreds*, of millions of dollars were lying around waiting to be made.

But it was hardly inevitable that anyone else's long-and-windy road to fruition as a media superpower would have started in a hamlet as unkempt, unlikely, and unheard-of as Bristol, Connecticut.

Maybe it all goes to prove that some higher power is a sports fan. Surely someone or something intervened to help see ESPN through the sometimes dark, sometimes bleak, occasionally slapdash early days. Today, lowly little Bristol has been transformed into the world headquarters of a globally branded, dominating presence.

Turns for the better were the results of crucial decisions made by six different men (and many others who worked for them or oversaw them). The men who at different times ran the company wound up being both the right guys for the job and, perhaps more important, the right guys for the era in which they served. So much so that if, along the way, someone were to have started messing around with the exact order in which these men took charge, it could well have knocked ESPN off its trajectory. The company and the network that are ESPN might not even exist (much less be bookworthy), might have stumbled ignominiously into oblivion, if not for the exact sequence of these decision makers and of the decisions they kept making.

There were many more people involved, of course, than just executives and owners. In the chapters ahead, you'll meet them—people who worked at the company or who dealt with it from outside its cloistered campus. They all have stories of their own—happy, sad, adventurous, timid, wholesome as pie, or lurid as pay-per-view porn.

ESPN's playing field has been populated with winners and losers, champions and chumps, cads and catalysts, heroes and, for lack of a better word, villains—and theirs is a shared story of struggle, defeat, more struggle, losses, and victory.

The story began decades ago, but in a way, it's a saga that's just getting started. As, indeed, are we....

## Blood: 1978–1979

“A fanatic is one who can’t change his mind and won’t change the subject.”

—Winston Churchill

*It all started with a \$9,000 investment, the purchase of a “transponder” by a father and son who had never seen one, and the suicide of a famous playboy.*

### **BILL RASMUSSEN, Chairman:**

I was fired as the communications manager for the Hartford Whalers in 1978, and then fired as executive director for Howe Enterprises. Gordie Howe was playing for the Whalers at the time, and the Enterprises job was just a way to do some things for Gordie and the boys. The way I was dismissed was intriguing. It was Memorial Day weekend, that Saturday morning, and I was getting ready to play golf. The phone rang and it was Colleen Howe, Gordie’s wife. She said, “I don’t have much time and really wanted to see you because I didn’t want to do it this way, but we’re terminating you at Howe Enterprises. I have to catch a plane, so good-bye.” It was a surefire way to ruin a good round of golf.

### **SCOTT RASMUSSEN, Executive Vice President:**

My dad was in broadcasting my whole life. We have a close relationship, but it’s complicated. We would broadcast high school hockey games together, and when he was with the Whalers, I filled in with a pregame talk show a few times. I had taken a year off after high school, then went to college for two years and dropped out. I don’t think my dad was surprised. School and I weren’t the best of friends.

Then my father and I did a TV show on Channel 18 in Hartford—which was a religious station the —called *Sports Only*, which basically was *SportsCenter* in its earliest form. It was around that time that my dad and I started batting around ideas, but none of them were quite right.

*Years before, in 1950, Bill Rasmussen had the opportunity to play in the Detroit Tigers Class D farm club; he would have grabbed at the chance, but like many others of that era, he felt he had to attend college—in his case, DePauw University—to hang on to a draft exemption that would keep him out of the Korean War. Sports remained his true love, however, and now, in 1978, with his forty-sixth birthday approaching, Rasmussen decided that the time had come to actually do what he dreamed of doing.*

*While working for the Whalers, Rasmussen had met an insurance man named Ed Eagan, who was working at Aetna but really wanted to be in television. Eagan had wanted to talk to Bill about the Hartford Whalers being the centerpiece of a monthly cable show about Connecticut sports.*

## BILL RASMUSSEN:

I called Ed Eagan right after Colleen's call and told him, "I don't think it's a very good idea to talk to me about the Whalers since I'm not there anymore," but he said, "Come on in, and we'll talk about something else." We ended up thinking we should do what I was going to do with the Whalers but do it independently. As the conversation continued we thought, why not do UConn basketball, and then we thought, if we can do UConn, why not Wesleyan, why not Yale, why not Fairfield, and Southern Connecticut? One thing led to another. Ed even had the idea for the first two shows: hot-air ballooning and a game from the Bristol Red Sox. Ed said we would tape a show every month with a sports topic of interest to Connecticut, and take these big two-inch reels of tape in his car to cable systems. We could do shorter distances on bicycle.

*Rasmussen knew virtually nothing about the cable TV business, but he wasn't alone: in 1978, there were just over 14 million homes receiving cable—less than 20 percent of all TV households. HBO had gone on the air in 1975 but offered limited programming and signed off at midnight. A year later, Ted Turner uplinked his then-piddling Atlanta UHF outlet to a satellite, thereby creating the country's first "SuperStation," but one that delivered more Braves games than original programming. The next year, televangelist Pat Robertson launched his 700 Club on satellite, and in 1978, despite the fact that HBO reached only 1.5 million homes, Viacom fired up its slow-blooming imitation, Showtime.*

*Regionally, cable was beginning to make some inroads. In Reading, Pennsylvania, a pioneering cable system acceded to demands from the local American Nazi Party to lease time on its public-access channel (regulations prohibited turning anybody down). On the other extreme, New York's Glenn O'Brien's TV Party provided a crazily kinetic TV home to punk rockers, subterranean semi-celebrities, and exploratory artists like Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and David Byrne. Among the lyrics to the show's theme song: "We've got nothing better to do than watch TV and have a couple of brews..."*

*Beginning in the summer of 1978, Bill, his son Scott, Eagan, and Eagan's buddy Bob Beyus, who owned a video production company, sought the backing of cable operators and potential investors for a new sports channel. They had originally wanted to name it SPN, the Sports Programming Network, but something called the Satellite Programming Network had already laid claim to those letters. Bill knew they'd have a tough time filling hours with only Connecticut sports and argued that they'd have to include some entertainment programming. Thus was it born: ESP, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network.*

*On June 26, presentations began. ESP invited twelve representatives of Connecticut's cable operators to a rented conference room at United Cable in Plainville, Connecticut. Only five showed up, and those mostly out of deference to Bill Rasmussen's contacts in the industry rather than out of breathless anticipation of the new enterprise. Skeptically, they listened to far-fetched proposals about delivering Connecticut collegiate sporting events, amateur sports, the Whalers, and "entertainment" programming to cable operators via an interstate network. The reaction was a double shot of bad news: implausible, the cable crowd said, and too costly.*

*Undaunted that the presentation bombed, the quartet of entrepreneurs pushed ahead, holding a press conference days later to spread the word. Of the thirty-five reporters invited to attend the grand announcement of ESP, a mere four attended, and none of them were particularly impressed. Neither was Beyus, who had thought it complete folly to hold a press conference without any contracts, but was outvoted by his partners. Immediately following the press conference, he officially flew the coop.*

*Still undeterred, the Rasmussens and Eagan formally incorporated ESP Network on July 14, 1978, for a fee of \$91.*

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**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

When Scott and I talked with Jim Dover over at United Cable, he told us about something new coming along called satellite communication and said it was going to be the wave of the future. A couple guys over at United helped us try to figure out what the satellites did, but nobody really had any idea. Then someone said that RCA was doing a lot of this stuff in Europe and we should talk to those guys. We called in the middle of the afternoon, and a young guy named Al Parinello answered the phone.

**AL PARINELLO, RCA Manager:**

In 1978, I was one of two people hired by RCA to penetrate the cable-television marketplace and basically convince new emerging networks that satellite distribution of their television product—as opposed to terrestrial distribution—was the wave of the future. RCA had launched a satellite called SATCOM 1, but no one understood that this thing was real, that it actually existed. Think about it: you couldn't see it, you couldn't touch it, and there was no way to demonstrate that it really was up there 22,300 miles above the equator. So it was a concept sale.

The first deal that I made was with a reverend who called me and said he wanted to buy one or two hours of satellite time. I said, "Sure. Where is the uplink going to be?" He said, "We'll use your New Jersey uplinking facility," and I said, "Okay, great. Now, where do you want us to bring the signal down? We have facilities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, wherever." And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, where's it going, where do you want the signal to go?" He said, "I want it to go to God." I said, "What do you mean you want it to go to God?" He said, "This is a program that my parishioners and I have put together. It's our message to God, and we want to send it to him by satellite. It's just going out there; it's not coming back." So I said, "Okay." It was a \$1,200 or \$1,300 deal. That was the first order that was ever on RCA SATCOM for cable television usage.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

Al wanted to get together and asked us where we were located, but we didn't have offices. We asked Jim Dover at United Cable if we could rent the conference room there and he said, "Give me a \$20 bill." So that was the rent, and Al came and showed us all these diagrams of satellites and how this happens, and how that happens.

**AL PARINELLO:**

We're talking pewter ashtrays, a big oak table, and china dishes that lunch was served on. Bill said, "This is our headquarters." Little did I know that he had rented this beautiful room.

My first question was "What kind of programming are we talking about?" And the answer was we're talking about regional sports programming—UConn sporting events, and so forth. I was confused. I'm like, "Bill, you need to understand that when you utilize satellite communications, your signal is going to go up to a geosynchronous satellite orbiting 24,300 miles above the equator. And because of that, anybody with an earth station anywhere can get your programming. So it seems to me that you shouldn't just be talking about Connecticut sports, why not think in terms of doing something a little bigger?"

That was the moment I saw Bill and Scott look at each other like I had just hit a nerve.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

Wow, what an eye-opener.

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**AL PARINELLO:**

I can still remember the conversation. Bill said, “Let me get this straight. You mean to tell me, for no extra money—for no extra money!—we could take this signal and beam it anywhere in the country?” And I said, “That’s right.” And then he asked again, “*Anywhere in the country?*” And I said, “Anywhere.” I remember we went back and forth like this a couple times. Bill and Scott were looking at each other, and they might have been getting sexually excited, I’m not sure. But I can tell that they were very, very excited.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

Al had been talking about us buying a transponder on the satellite for nightly stuff on an hourly basis, but then he said the fateful words: “We used to have another one that was twenty-four hours a day, but no one bought it so we took it off the market.” We all just looked at each other for a moment. So then I asked him what that would cost. He said, “\$34,167 a month.”

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

I was only twenty-two at that point but I could figure out that \$1,143 for twenty-four hours was a better deal than 1,250 bucks for five hours, so there was no question we should sign up for the full service. We were able to send a satellite signal around America for less money than it cost to send the same signal around Connecticut via landlines.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

Before Al got in his car, Scott said, “We should get three of those,” and I said, “We don’t have the money to buy even one.” But we called Al the next day and said, “We’ll take one.” And Al says, “You’ll take one what?” We said, “We’ll take one of those twenty-four-hour ones that you’ve never sold before.”

**AL PARINELLO:**

Bill’s first goal was to convince me, as the representative of RCA, that I should go back to corporate and recommend this new venture as a viable candidate, and I was convinced. I was absolutely blown away by these two. They were good people. They were smart. They were savvy. And they listened intently. I went back to the home office and said, “I think we have good people here whom we can trust. I can’t vouch for where the money’s coming from, but if we don’t have a check by X date, we’ll throw this deal away.” It was that simple.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

What we didn’t know was that there was going to be a column in the *Wall Street Journal* the day after Labor Day saying the wave of the future was satellites at RCA. They got a ton of applications after that, but we already had our transponder reserved.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

All of a sudden we had this distribution technology, but we had no idea about anything else.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

It was August 16, 1978. Scott and I were driving to the Jersey shore from Connecticut. We were on

our way to see my daughter, who was working down there for the summer. It was her birthday; we couldn't miss it, we had to go. So we had a blue stick-shift Toyota, no air-conditioning. It was going to be a hot day, so we started driving early in the morning because we had to drive at least four hours. And as we approached Waterbury, just east of route 84, traffic just stopped. I bet I could place us within a hundred feet of it if we were driving right now. We were just sitting there in traffic and it was real hot. So we started doing a lot of brainstorming.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

Putting the two of us in a car was a sure recipe that all we were going to talk about was the business and what we were going to do with the transponder. We were having arguments, creative arguments, and they got pretty heated. At some point—we were on I-84 in Waterbury—I just got really fed up and I turned to my father and said, “I don't care what you do with it, show football all weekend, see if I care.” And for the first time all morning he didn't yell back at me. He said, “That's it! Not football, but sports!”

From that moment on for the rest of the day I was scribbling notes on a pad. We showed up at the Jersey shore but ignored my sister on her birthday. We were coming up with all kinds of ideas, estimating cable penetration, and trying to figure out how many people we would need. We talked about the cable subscribers and what kind of deal we could offer them. We talked about coming up with programming, and that we'd have one anchor sportscaster and then hire a bunch of other people for next to nothing. I probably filled every piece of paper on that pad. That night we couldn't even get to sleep.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

In one single day we decided that we would do sports twenty-four hours a day, have a half-hour sports show at 6:30 every night, which would be the sports center, that we would go out and hire sportscasters, and buy a fleet of trucks that would roam the nation covering sporting events.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

The next day we got in the car and talked all the way home. The plan was born, I won't say fully hatched, but the big parameters were already in place before we got back to Connecticut that night.

When we got in the house it was well after midnight and we couldn't think of anything more to talk about, so we decided to design a building, you know, what's our building going to be like? We took out a ruler that was marked off in eighth-of-an-inch increments and so we decided that one inch equaled eight feet in our scale. I think the initial size was 96 by 64 and we made it two stories. We put in the executive-office corner, and we put in the studio. And we're rearranging and drawing and it's probably two in the morning and my dad just roars back and starts laughing. He says, “It's funny, we've got to have a tape room!” He took an eraser and erased the outside wall, made the building eight feet longer and we had a tape room! What we sketched out that night *is* what was done. The executive offices, the control room, everything.

I can't fully describe the excitement of those two car rides. We were thinking we had the greatest idea in the history of the world and needed to guard it really carefully because people were going to want to steal it from us. It took us a little while to realize most people were going to laugh at us when they heard it, so eventually we got over that initial paranoia.

Then RCA called. They were concerned because they didn't have our financials on record to back up our order. I basically said, “You know I can't believe you're even asking this question. You haven't

sent us an invoice. If you have concerns, send us an invoice and we'll pay it." Then they probably thought, "All right, well, it must be okay, and we'll send them an invoice." Fortunately they didn't send it for ninety days.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

At first, I was just using my own money—about \$9,000 that I had put on a credit card, but that was no way to finance a business. So I went to my family in Chicago—my sister, my brother [Don], my mother and father—and put together \$30,000.

**DON RASMUSSEN, *Regional Manager*:**

I was a junior high school principal in 1978, and on December 14 my dad called and said, "Your brother Bill's here and he wants to come down and see you." I said, "Okay, have him come on down." When I got off the phone and told my wife, she said, "Bill wants money." Now, you have to understand that my wife and I had been married for twenty-two years and Bill had never been to our home. So this was really something.

There's a dynamic in our family that was either intentionally or unintentionally cultivated from the time we were kids—it impacts us to this day and had a big impact on the creation of ESPN. My brother Bill is five years older than I am. We had another brother who was less than a year older than me, who was killed as a naval navigator in a plane crash. And we have a sister who is three years younger than me. There was never any affection in the family at all. Now, as we grew up, Bill was the king of the roost, the child with talent and intelligence, and everybody else came in second. No matter what I did, it never measured up to Bill and all his successes.

Only twice in my life can I recall Bill challenging me. The first time was when I got out of the air force and he invited my wife and me to work at his factory during the summer. Somehow we got to digging deep holes in his basement because he was having problems with flooding. He started clowning around and said, "You're a big judo man in the air force, I want to see if you can throw me. Come on." I said, "Bill, you don't want to go there. I don't want to do that." He said, "Well, you're going to have to, because I'm going to come at you." And he did. So I took him down and broke three of his ribs, unintentionally. I wasn't trying to hurt him. After that, he never bothered me physically again.

The second time he challenged me resulted in a lawsuit over ESPN.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

When we were growing up, Don was always the third brother and it was tough for him. He was five years younger, so there's no way he could compete—but he wanted to. And more power to him. But we've always had a most distant relationship.

**DON RASMUSSEN:**

Now, during the time that he was at our house, Bill said, "The reason we've come to you is simply because we want the family involved." I didn't really know him all that well anymore, but my dad did and my sister did, and he told me, "Dad has committed to give us \$10,000, Vivian, our sister, has given us \$15,000, and we need another \$10,000 from you to give us a little bit of a bridge until the big money starts rolling in. This way you'll be a part of it, and for your \$10,000, you'll get 2 percent of the company."

I said, "Bill, I've got four kids I'm raising, I'm a junior high school principal, and I don't have \$10,000 to just give you," and he said, "Well, can you get it before Monday?" And I said, "Yeah, I've

got some friends I could probably talk to and they'd give me \$10,000, but I'm not sure I want to do it." Then he went back to the big story about it being a family business and so forth, and I said, "Okay, I'll get you \$10,000 by Monday." He said, "Okay, but we have to have it as soon as the bank opens on Monday."

I told him okay, but "if I get you some money, I want to join the company" and reminded him that I did have a background in play-by-play, radio, and I could learn other things. So he agreed that if I got the money, I could join the company. No specified duties were discussed, except he said, "You will never, ever be on television with us." I said, "Okay, that's no big deal." I just thought, well, he's the TV guy, and if that's the way he wants it to be, that's okay with me. I should have suspected some personality conflicts at that point, but I didn't.

So I talked to a friend who had a lot of money and he turned it down. Then I talked to the number two on my list and he said, "Sure I'll give you \$10,000 and whatever comes out of it, half of it's yours and half of it's mine." He wrote me the checks and said he would cover them first thing Monday morning so I could wire them to Bill. And that's what I did.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

I jokingly say that ESPN was built on a dump, but that's what the Bristol redevelopment was, they took a dump, put fresh grass over it, and called it prime real estate. It was pure luck that we ended up on that spot. They couldn't give these parcels away, and we agreed to buy one right then. We started in Plainville. They could have had ESPN there. We had an address, 319 Fifth Avenue. But they had an ordinance against satellite dishes, and they successfully kept us out. I think things turned out okay for Bristol.

Since we had no knowledge of how satellites worked and what kinds of specifications we would need, we called Scientific Atlanta, the supplier of satellite installations, to see if we could put a signal up to a satellite from there. We had to be careful because there are certain angles that prevent the signals from getting through. They told us we could not have picked a better place. The signal is supposed to be ten and a quarter degrees above the earth to hit the satellite, and we were right there. If it had been another quarter degree off, we would have been out of luck. You know what we paid for that first piece of land, that acre plus? \$18,000.

We still needed more money, and a friend I knew told me to call a guy named J. B. Doherty, who had an investment firm named K. S. Sweet outside Philadelphia. He listened to my story and asked me if I could come down to his office the next day to talk with me some more.

**J. B. DOHERTY, *Venture Capitalist:***

We took a security interest in the transponder rights and were comfortable with the fact that if the business was not going to get further financing, we were going to get our money back by releasing the transponder to someone else.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

My father and I were amazed when we got the down payment from J. B. Doherty and K. S. Sweet Associates. We thought he'd give us \$35,000 so we could pay a few other bills—but they gave us the exact amount, \$34,167.

*No matter. The transponder had been purchased, and it was now the new network's most prized possession. Over the coming years, it would become the Hope Diamond, Holy Grail, and best asset for*

*ESPN, the critical factor in making so many of the possibilities the Rasmussens discussed a reality.*

*Bill and Scott Rasmussen's decision to buy a transponder on RCA SATCOM 1 in 1978: Step Number One in ESPN's rise to world dominance.*

**J. B. DOHERTY:**

Bill and Scott were floundering around trying to find a permanent financing source while we were funding the thing on an interim basis. We were looking for the big institutional investor and talked to various venture funds and insurance companies. We went to six or seven places but they all said no.

We were responsible for overseeing one of our insurance company's institutional-investor clients who had an investment in a hotel property in Hawaii, and Getty Oil was involved. Getty had a division that held all the non-oil parts of Getty, like hotels, nut groves, and other very strange things. It was run by a guy named Stuart Evey, and we took the idea to him.

*Jean Paul Getty had five wives and five divorces, so his money suffered, but there always seemed to be "more where that came from"—meaning the ground. Oil made Getty a millionaire, starting in 1916, when a million bucks still meant something, and it made him a billionaire within a few decades, especially once his oil holdings were extended to encompass wells in Saudi Arabia.*

*Six sons were born to Getty over the course of his five marriages, but only one—the first—was named after Jean Paul's father, George. George Getty II was deeply troubled in the way rich men's sons are widely expected, and some perhaps doomed, to be.*

*On the evening of June 5, 1973, the son reached his breaking point. That night George had been especially upset and irritable, downing many a beer, two bottles of wine, some pills, and talking bitterly about the desirability of death. Eventually, he managed to get hold of a barbecue fork and poke an inch-deep gash in his gut. As blood spewed, George threatened to shoot everyone in sight, then locked himself in his bedroom. When none of the family could coax him to open the door, the family decided the only alternative was to summon George's executive assistant and family confidant Stuart Evey, who rushed over in the middle of the night to take charge. The first thing Evey did was send two Bel Air security guards away; Evey was determined to keep this a private matter.*

*Cleaning up family messes and keeping them out of the papers was unofficially part of Evey's job. But this was personal, too, since George had, in fact, been Evey's mentor at Getty Oil.*

**STUART EVEY, Vice President, Getty Oil:**

George Getty was not a big daily drinker. He was impulsive. Every once in a while, about every four months, he might go on a kick where he'd drink like a sieve, you know, ten, twelve beers at a time, but then he wouldn't have anything for six months or so. I was loyal to him, but I was also close to his wife, Jacqueline. She had a separate schedule, and we spent a lot of time together. I dated her for a while when George was still alive. I was still married, but you know, kind of on the outside of it.

George and his wife had had an argument earlier and he'd taken a barbecue fork and punched his stomach. He tried to kill himself, I think to spare her, I know him that well. George's wife called me about midnight and said that George was not doing well and could I come over. So I went to the house and found out that he was in his bedroom and that he wouldn't open the door. I could hear snoring as loud as I've ever heard in my life. So I tried to be gentle, but then finally he just wouldn't come to the door so I called the doctor, our house doctor, if you will. He was a private practitioner but he was on our payroll and he had done a lot of stuff with George. He came to the house, we broke the door down, went in, and George was lying on the bed. He was in his boxer shorts only and there was blood, a

wound in his stomach. But he was breathing and snoring loud so I said to the doctor, “What’s wrong with him?” And he said, “It sounds like he’s drunk.” So I said, “God, I don’t want this getting out.”

Now in retrospect, we should’ve taken him across the street to UCLA, but I took the doctor’s advice and we went to another hospital, which was farther away but more discreet. I was protecting the company and J. Paul from this potential scandal, you know? Again, protecting George, I registered him in the name of Glenn Davis, who at that time was a very close friend of mine, a former Heisman Trophy winner from West Point. The whole night went on with George in ICU, and then I went with him into his hospital room, where I elected to sleep that night. About three hours later, a herd of people came running in—apparently the monitors went haywire. They rushed him out of there and within an hour they pronounced him dead. Well, there I was with nobody knowing, only me. So I tried to gather myself up, then went into the office in the morning. I called J. Paul Getty and told him George was in a coma, that he hadn’t died yet, but it didn’t look like he was going to recover in a reasonable fashion. I knew he had died, but I didn’t want to shock the old man first off. Then a little later I called back and said, “Mr. Getty, it’s hard for me to call you like this, but I must tell you that George has passed away.” He didn’t say much, quite honestly.

Then J. Paul Getty called me back and asked, “Who do you think should be temporary executive vice president?” And I said, “You will recall, Mr. Getty, that George had written you recently about the company’s management and he was very high on the current vice president of finance, Sid Peterson.” And I said, “You know, if you’d like to follow George, it seems to me that he would recommend Sid Peterson.” He said, “Would you issue a statement to that effect in the company?” So I gathered our top executives together and told them that George had passed away and that Sid Peterson had been named to succeed George, not in an official capacity, because that action would take the board of directors, but that Mr. Getty—J. Paul—had recommended that Sid Peterson act in George’s absence.

*The following fall, tragedy struck the Gettys again: J. Paul’s grandson was kidnapped by the Mafia in Italy. When J. Paul announced he would pay “not one penny” of ransom, the kidnappers chopped off the boy’s ear and sent it home. Eventually the rest of the boy followed—alive—and when it was time for the young man to go to work, it was Evey who would get the call to find him a suitable job within the company.*

*For favors rendered, for doing his duty well beyond the call of it, Stuart Evey would be rewarded with what could only be called a glamorous position at the firm, vice president of non-oil operations, put in charge of everything Getty was involved with other than oil. While other Getty executives spent their time crunching numbers or traipsing through dirt to see if wells were dry duds or potential gushers, Stuart hung out at a luxury resort in Mexico, at wineries, or wherever Getty had investments.*

*As yet another desirable perk, Evey spent time with athletes and movie stars in Hollywood, magnetically attracted as they were to the Getty name and connection. This earned Evey envy, if not outright jealousy, from those other executives. But they knew what Stuart knew—that his power came from on high. After all, he was the one who had told J. Paul who should be the president of the company.*

**GEORGE CONNER, Finance Manager, Getty Oil:**

I was hired by Getty in Los Angeles to be the finance manager. We had responsibility for the J. Paul Getty castle in England, the Getty Museum, the automobile fleets in Los Angeles, pistachio

groves in Bakersfield, and some vineyards for wineries. People knew Getty Oil had money, so they would bring a lot of crazy ideas to us hoping that Getty would say yes, we'll invest in it. We had just brought in Jack Nicklaus to look at installing a second eighteen-hole golf course at the Kona Surf hotel in Hawaii.

Stu Evey was not your typical conservative oil company executive. He was Hollywood. You'd be in his office and our senior secretary would come in and say, "Mr. Evey, Mr. Hope's on the phone." Stu would hit the speaker button so everyone could hear and it would be Bob Hope. He ran with that crowd.

**STUART EVEY:**

I was a big-time person down in Acapulco because I represented Getty. I'd come walking into the hotel after arriving and the band would switch to play my favorite song. The jet-set people always wanted to buy me drinks and stuff like that because they wanted to get close to the owner, you know. So I played that pretty good. I spent six years in and out of there, building the hotel and building the golf course, and I would make deals with foreign photographers who wanted to come and use our facilities for free. Well, they'd bring all of these gals, and I got brochures for our hotel free. The women part of it is kind of interesting. I mean, it's hard for me.

I had a trusting relationship with the family. I helped George with a lot of problems, even with his kids in their younger ages. And I kept it all quiet. He did some damage around the house with his first wife—he got upset with her during their turmoil, so I quietly had some doors put back on.

**J. B. DOHERTY:**

My take is Stu was sort of this jock sniffer or wannabe. This sports venture satisfied his ego to the point where I think he got himself one of those jackets like the on-air guys wore back in the early days. He was the kind of manager that could only survive in a fairly unprofessional corporate environment, and Getty Oil at that time was still run like a family business.

**STUART EVEY:**

J. B. asked me if I'd meet with this guy who had been everywhere trying to sell his idea, and would I have any interest at all in talking to him because they were no longer going to finance him. He had run completely out of money and struck out everywhere. I told him I'd meet with him because I believed "you never know."

Bill came to my office very disgruntled because he knew, in his mind apparently, that there's no way an oil company would ever be interested in what he had in mind.

**GEORGE CONNER:**

In December of 1978, I was in my office in Los Angeles, and Stu calls me up to his office and says "George, I have something I want you to look at." This was pretty early in the morning, maybe nine-ish. He said, "Bill Rasmussen just left my office"—of course I didn't know who Bill Rasmussen was at that time—and he said, "George, why don't you take a look at this business plan and I'll call you in the middle of the afternoon." It was maybe ten or fifteen pages in a clear plastic folder. I told Janet, my secretary, Stu must be pretty excited about this to want an answer so fast. Sure enough, at 11:30 he calls and says, "George, I'll meet you at the L.A. Club," which was a private club on top of our Getty Oil building at Wilshire and Western in Los Angeles. So we go up to the bar. He has a Scotch and water and I have a rum and Coke, and he said, "George, what do you think?" I said, "Stu, I think it looks pretty interesting. Let's look at it." He says okay. And about five minutes later, he said,

“George, only one problem. Bill has to have a yes or no answer by December 31,” which was three weeks away. And I said, “Stu, you know as well as I do that Getty can’t say yes to a project of this magnitude in three weeks.” He says, “Okay, just start on it.” So I went back to my office and the only thing I worked on from that point until the end of December was the ESP Network project.

**STUART EVEY:**

I liked the prospect of it for about two weeks. Then I saw the stumbling blocks and recognized that we hadn’t spent nearly enough time researching it. Most of my investigations about ESPN came from people that I knew. I was responsible for George Getty’s thoroughbred business, breeding, and horse racing; in that capacity I got to know an awful lot of people, including the chairman, at that time, of Time-Life Books. I called him and he introduced me on the phone to the guy who was running HBO back then. I talked to him about what he thought of this idea we were considering, and he said, “There’s no way anybody will ever watch sports twenty-four hours a day.”

**GEORGE CONNER:**

The initial proposal from Bill was for \$10 million, and what Bill wanted to do was build some studios in Bristol, Connecticut. I knew where Connecticut was; I didn’t know where Bristol was. He wanted to build four state-of-the-art television production trucks with the most expensive equipment that there was to be built by Compact Video in Burbank; he wanted to hire some very expensive on-the-air talent; and he wanted to pay the NCAA, I don’t remember the exact number, but something like \$450,000 for the first contract to rebroadcast NCAA events and show them over and over and over.

I was trying to learn about transponders and Nielsen ratings and all that. I needed to get up to speed so I could properly evaluate it and make a recommendation for Getty to invest or not.

A friend introduced me to Tex Schramm, who was the general manager of the Dallas Cowboys at that time. I told him we were looking at doing a venture that would have sports on television twenty-four hours a day. His comment was “There’s already an awful lot of sports on television.”

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

Getty had this thing where every investment has a best outcome, a probable outcome, or a worst outcome, and Stu would ask us to come out and present details about the cable industry and our business. I remember the topic of the day once was where will the cable industry be at the end of the 1980s, and how many subscribers would we have? There were 12.5 million cable homes in 1979, and we put together a presentation that said 30 million homes in ten years. Stu was really upset with us and told us that number was way too high and irresponsible. Turns out, at the end of the eighties there were 60 million homes.

We had somehow managed to pay ourselves \$1,500 a month, but we were running out of money and we had to have an answer by the end of the year, which was twenty-two days away. I was worried because most companies can’t make that kind of decision that fast.

**GEORGE CONNER:**

So the end of December comes—the 27th, 28th, or something. Stu called me in and asked, “George, what do you think?” I said, “Stu, if Bill has to have an answer today, we have to tell him no but I kind of like the idea and I think you do, too. Why don’t we fund payroll and some other expenses until we can finish looking at it.” When we told our response to Bill, there was a long pause, but then he said that sounded pretty good. I mean, he had been turned down by seven other companies, he was

up to his limit on every credit card he had, and the venture capital fund in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, had said they weren't going to put any more money in it. This was the best offer he had.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

Then we had the situation with the Bristol development commission. We had “bought” the land but hadn't paid for it. They told us, “If you don't have financials at our next meeting in February, we're going to give the land to somebody else.” My dad was out West pleading with Stu to find a way that we could give hints to others that Getty was going to invest, but the word from Stu was absolutely no. They hadn't committed anything; they weren't going to let their name be associated with it. So my father called and said, “You're going to have to do what you can. Go to the meeting and buy us a month.” I sat there, kind of depressed, trying to think what I was going to say that night. Then I watched as it began to snow. The storm became so bad, the meeting was canceled. By the next month Getty was in. Had it not snowed, I don't know what I would've said, or if we would have found a way to buy a month. We might have lost Bristol.

*Eight thousand, seven hundred, and sixty hours to fill. To realize his dream of a 24/7 network, Bill Rasmussen would need a much better recipe than the motley stew he'd prepared to air so far: Australian rules football, slow-pitch softball, Irish bicycling, and, also from Ireland, Munster hurling—which has nothing to do with vomiting cheese or trying to heave Herman, Lily, or Grandpa across a barroom floor. (Hurling is an Irish variation on rugby, with the same shirts and slightly different rules. For many years it had failed to take America by storm.) Rasmussen knew there was no way he could afford TV rights to any big-ticket pro sports. But college sports? That might work, he reasoned and with the right ones, maybe he could persuade Getty Oil to fork over more dough. In Connecticut, NCAA basketball was king, and Rasmussen believed that this game—fast-moving, flashy, energetic—had the potential to woo new viewers. And a juicy contract with the league could do more than spike viewership; it could be the major, critical coup to give ESP legitimacy and stature.*

*Rasmussen made a sales call on the National Collegiate Athletic Association headquarters in Shawnee Mission, Kansas. A presentation filled with enticing generalities had been hastily cobbled together and rushed to a printer; even Rasmussen was surprised at how well it turned out. Plans for the new twenty-four-hour sports network included a major role for the NCAA, league leaders were told. Rasmussen also argued that their annual basketball tournament was getting insufficient attention from the current rights holder, NBC, and that there was great untapped potential in the tourney's early rounds. Those games, he said, suffered from severe media malnourishment. By airing the beginning of the tournament, ESP, as it was still known, could attract more fans for the NCAA while at the same time, and not incidentally, enticing viewers to sample ESP's other offerings.*

*Fortunately, the name Getty carried clout, and it helped ESP get taken seriously by the NCAA, at the bargaining table and elsewhere. Rasmussen was, in fact, cleverly playing both sides against the middle: he convinced the NCAA of the network's importance by dropping the name Getty every chance he could, and he enticed Evey and the Getty hierarchy to be more generous to ESP every time by dangling the prestigious acronym NCAA in front of them.*

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

In our negotiations with the NCAA, we talked about doing all the championships. For example, CBS was contracted for college football and for a one-minute highlight of the lacrosse championship game to be shown on the *CBS Sports Spectacular*, which was their Sunday afternoon answer to ABC's

*Wide World of Sports*. Our presentation proposed complete live coverage of not only the lacrosse Final Four, but also Soccer Final Four, Hockey Frozen Four, and the entire College World Series from Omaha. They actually gave us their logo to put on the side of our trucks for the first year on the road. That was a real coup because they guard that so jealously. We were talking about doing every game that the networks didn't do during the basketball tournament, which was, like, all of them, except the did weekend games and that was it. I remember Walter Byers said to me, "Do you mean if Weber State and Lamar Tech are playing, you're going to televise it?" "If they're in the tournament, yeah. Every game. We mean every game." You know, if you go back and look, who played in March of 1980, Weber State and Lamar Tech played. I don't know whether that was rigged or whether it was just the luck of the draw, but that's just such a coincidence. It's very difficult for me to believe that wasn't a test.

*As talks continued, one thing became clear: if ESP was going to get NCAA basketball, it would have to show interest—sincere or not—in the NCAA's seventeen other sports as well. So the network pledged that "the entire spectrum of NCAA sports will be included in the ESP package," including hockey, soccer, lacrosse, and the collegiate baseball "world series" from Omaha. A deal was forged: "A two-year agreement for the exclusive national cablecasting of a series of NCAA championships, as well as college and conference regular-season events in 18 sports, has been reached by the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, Inc., of Plainville, Connecticut... With the exception of specific events and sports programming already committed to other networks, ESP's cable coverage will be designed to include each NCAA national championship in the Association's three divisions."*

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

Getty wanted to see the results of a meeting we had scheduled with the NCAA. Walter Byers himself had said let's talk, and I went back and forth to the NCAA's headquarters in Kansas City a few times. Everything came together on Valentine's Day. I was in Kansas City and they were agreeing to put this contract together. I also got a call from George saying that Stu had decided to go ahead and wanted me to fly out to L.A. after my meeting. So on the 14th of February, 1979, both the NCAA and Getty verbally said yes.

*The final, binding document was signed on March 14, 1979. ESP was still six months from going on the air, but what happened that March would turn out to be a rousing endorsement of ESP's strategy as well as a terrific bit of timing.*

*Rasmussen may have been bluffing about the latent potential he claimed to see in the tournament's early rounds, but he was seen as a Nostradamus of the NCAA almost immediately. The 1979 tournament turned out to be the most exciting ever held up to that time—and for years thereafter. The final game, on March 26—two weeks after the NCAA and ESP signed their contract—kept 24.1 million viewers superglued to their couch cushions, enthralled not so much by the matchup of the teams as by their two electrifying star players: Indiana State's Larry Bird and Michigan State's Magic Johnson.*

*Future ESPNer Michael Wilbon wrote that the 1979 tournament "launched the popularity of college basketball and began the Golden Age of professional basketball" as well. It's been said that the final game was the most-watched in basketball television history, and that it played a greater role in the start-up and eventual success of ESPN than any other sports event. Cable systems found*

*themselves flooded with requests from fans demanding “that channel that has all the basketball.”*

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**STUART EVEY:**

While it's true that before Getty was officially involved the NCAA indicated that they would look at Rasmussen's proposal, they didn't commit to it until I made a personal visit to the then-director, Walter Byers, evidencing our commitment to proceed. And let me tell you, that deal was probably one of the key reasons ESPN survived.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

A small part of Stu's money started coming in February of '79, but I consider a meeting with Getty that happened in May to be the most significant. They had given us \$5 million to tide us over while they kept looking at things, and in May they had to make a go, no-go decision. They had my father and me come out to Getty in California, and we sat at this huge table at the Getty complex. It was kind of like a horseshoe, or a boomerang-shaped type of table. We were on the inside and there were a whole bunch of Getty folks on the other side and they were trying to be intimidating. They were very good at it.

Sid Peterson, the president, was there and so was Harold Berg, the chairman. There were legal counsels there too and, of course, Stu. I didn't understand the corporate politics that Stu was playing, but it was clear that he had gotten to the point where he had to sell it again for that go, no-go decision.

**GEORGE CONNER:**

I'd never come across anyone who was more of a master politician. If Stu decided he wanted to do something, he would line his ducks up with the board members behind the scenes before a board vote. He always knew what the outcome was going to be.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

Somebody asked a question about our revenue projection through 1988. I gave an answer that was terribly imprecise and totally worthless.

Sid Peterson basically took command of the meeting then and said, “Look, he doesn't know what the revenue is going to be in 1988 anymore than we do. We have a decision to make. If we believe in these underlying assumptions that people will watch a channel like this and that advertisers will support narrow casting and all the different assumptions that are built into it, this is going to be a big win for all of us. If it's not, it's going to be another dry hole. We make decisions like this in the oil industry every day. Let's decide.” My father and I were then asked to leave and they had their discussion, and we were told after lunch that they voted to fund it.

It was in theory a commitment for \$100 million, but the actual allocation was probably about \$15 million. But more than the specifics, more than the numbers, Getty was embracing and committing that they were going to fund this and make it go.

*Bill and Scott Rasmussen had been to more than half a dozen potential suitors before Evey, and all had said no. Chances are they wouldn't have found another investor, certainly not someone willing to risk millions. Whether it was Evey's love of sports and his love for star athletes; whether it was the idea of doing something in George Getty's name to make his mentor proud; or whether it was just egomania, it was Evey's Getty money that brought the Rasmussen dream to life.*

*Getty's investment of \$15 million in May of 1979: Step Number Two in ESPN's rise to world*

**STUART EVEY:**

I was laughed at in the company, in a kind of a kidding way. They even called it “Evey Sports Programming Network,” not ESPN. My whole business reputation was put on the line. Nobody had any idea the risk I took. But I had done so many things from the hip that had turned out so successfully, from a golf course in Acapulco to giving a big investment to the government in Africa for a boondoggle which we took a huge tax loss on, but more than made up for when we discovered oil in the North Sea.

There’s absolutely no way Getty would have gone into ESPN without me. None. I was given that opportunity to take the risk for past performance perhaps, but also for personal relationships. I did that primarily because I thought George Getty would’ve liked it. I know that sounds ridiculous, but it’s not. George Getty always wanted to get involved with a business that didn’t have his father’s name tacked to it, a successful business, and that motivated the hell out of me. He had died in ’74, and this idea didn’t come along until ’78, but it was still almost like in his memory. If he didn’t get to do it, maybe I could. I was surrounded by oilmen who were using money to drill oil wells; shit, I was using money to build a new TV network.

**SCOTT RASMUSSEN:**

There were times when I thought that one of the reasons we got approved is some of the people at Getty wanted Stu to fail. I think some people thought funding ESPN would be a way to take him down a peg or two when it went under.

**BILL RASMUSSEN:**

You really didn’t want to negotiate with Stu. The whole time we were going to do this thing it was for an 80/20 split, and just as we’re about to close the deal, Stu said, “I’ve been thinking about this and I want 85 percent.” He wasn’t asking, he was telling. It wasn’t like there was a rational reason for the change. But we couldn’t say, “Forget it, we’re going somewhere else,” because there was nowhere else. We wouldn’t have had anything.

**J. B. DOHERTY:**

Stu had the morals of a rattlesnake. There were all these signals about doing the deal without us and I had to remind them that we were prepared to sell the transponder rights to the highest bidder and that we weren’t going to roll over. Stu and Getty were so busy taking steps to basically screw the minority shareholders that we actually put up a \$50,000 retainer with Skadden, Arps just to send a signal to Getty that we weren’t going to sit around passively and let him completely ignore our interests. Stu was a guy without a moral compass.

*In May 1979, Anheuser-Busch signed the largest advertising contract in cable history with ESP for \$1,380,000. Bill and Scott Rasmussen celebrated the contract by drinking a Budweiser; a few six-packs would have supplied their staff. Rasmussen knew the network needed more sponsors and recognition. Ever mulling, he came to the conclusion that a four-letter acronym would help distinguish ESP from the Big Three three-letter networks and give ESP more promotional potential. So on July 1, 1979, he added the word “network” to the name and an “N” to the monogram, and the ESP Network became ESPN-TV. Rasmussen brought it to printer Guy Wilson, who dropped the “-TV,” which*

sounded like a local station's call letters anyway, changed the logo's type font, and added an elliptical circle around the bold letters "ESPN."

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Stuart Evey, meanwhile, was following his money. While Bill and Scott pushed forward to a planned September launch, Evey decided it was time to supplement the executive ranks. He called his pal Hollywood super-lawyer Ed Hookstratten, known ominously around town as "The Hook," and put him on the case. Evey informed Rasmussen too, and Good Ol' Chairman Bill set out in search of a president who would report to him, with Scott holding on to the title of executive vice president. Evey's plan, after all, sounded reasonable enough...

**DICK EBERSOL, Chairman, NBC Sports:**

I had been fired by NBC as head of comedy, variety, and specials in January of 1979. [Legendary programmer] Brandon Tartikoff said at the time, "Dick then backpacked in his Porsche." I can't remember whether Bill Rasmussen made the first phone call to me himself or whether there was an intermediary, but ultimately I was talking to him. Bill and I had at least two meetings, and he seemed very, very intrigued by the idea of me coming to ESPN. Bill told me that I would be hearing from a guy named Stu Evey; I didn't know who Stu Evey was at the time.

**STUART EVEY:**

Dick Ebersol was Bill Rasmussen's idea. He gave me his name as a possibility for president because of his *Wide World of Sports* experience under Roone Arledge. But I never spoke to Dick Ebersol personally.

**DICK EBERSOL:**

Stu invited me to a meeting in late June of 1979, and we met late in the afternoon. I was well-read enough as a kid to understand that these people were to the right of the Reichstag. This was no great middle-of-the-road American institution, this was Getty Oil! I found it so odd that they were really going to fund this wacky idea where you get a satellite and people everywhere could watch Connecticut sports. But you could see it was growing from that; I mean, they had already done this NCAA deal with Walter Byers, which I give Rasmussen a lot of credit for. That doesn't get remembered. Evey seemed almost overly large; he more than filled the room. He was very clear about letting me know it would be him and not Bill making the decision. He did say, "You're Bill's first choice for this role."

Anyway, Evey seemed intrigued by me but I didn't hear anything for four or five days, so I called him up late one afternoon and said we should have another conversation. We met at a restaurant on Ventura Boulevard in the Valley that was a favorite of his. Except for maybe some college escapade, there was more alcohol poured that night than any other night in my life. I'm not a drinker, but he just kept pouring and pouring. It's one of only two times in my life I went in the bathroom and put my fingers down my throat to throw up so I could go back and take more of this while this guy went on.

I was very much intrigued by the job.

**STUART EVEY:**

The major player who had the most to do with our broadcasting end of the business was Ed Hookstratten. Ed had a reputation of being the most powerful man, agent-wise, in broadcasting. He represented the major on-air personalities in the network business. Ed and I crossed paths at many social events. As executive assistant to George Getty, I traveled in a crowd like that, and Ed was a personal friend of mine. Getty hired him on a consulting basis for procuring our on-air talent and all

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