

AFTER PRANCING AROUND THE U.S. FOR ELEVEN YEARS, STEPHEN JACKSON CLOSES IN ON DECADE IN LAS VEGAS

*** (Due to a production error last week, the column guides misled the reader in the following story.

It is the Sentinel's responsibility to correct any mistakes that are made. We apologize for the inconvenience.)

W.G. Ramirez

He has been anywhere from Pasadena, California to Flagstaff, Arizona; Wallawalla, Washington to Yakima, Washington; Jackson, Mississippi to Cedar Rapids, Iowa; then, he ended up back in California.

"Every place I've been has been very unique," explains Channel 13 Sports Anchor/Reporter Stephen Jackson. "I worked in the epitome, the heart of Dixie, Jackson, Mississippi. Mississippi was the toughest, roughest, meanest place in the South, yet there I was."

It wasn't until January 1985 that Jackson made his way to Las Vegas, with wife Annette, for the #2 position in the Channel 13 Sports Department. Already cemented in at #1 was present Sports Director Ron Futrell, who had arrived just eight months prior in April of '84.

"The position he is in here is only because of a matter of timing," says Futrell. "Steve is a great guy." Ask either of them who the boss is and both will tell you "it's not that kind of relationship."

"He can spin circles around me when it comes to the knowl-

edge of sports," admits Futrell. "I use him as a resource often. I wish I knew half of what he knows."

"Technically I work for him," says Jackson, "but it's more of a relationship of working with him. Ron is an easy person to work with."

Channel 13 Sports Producer Mario Diaz reiterated the point: "(Steve) is great to work with. Stephen likes to present things in his own manner. He is very detailed and informs the viewer the way things are supposed to be done. He likes to write all of his own stuff."

Quietly working on a decade in Las Vegas, Jackson is currently the only Black sports anchor in the local market, but that, he says, he is used to.

"Up until the time I went to work in Mississippi, I had always been the only black guy in the shop. Every now and then, once in a blue moon, you might get a bigot call the TV station after a sportscast. That is so rare though, I don't think there has been a call like that in three years.

"I was a sports director in a place where not that many years before I went there, I couldn't walk on the same side of the street with certain people," exclaimed Jackson about Mississippi. "You could get yourself in all kinds of trouble just looking at someone the wrong way."

"Supposedly my grandfather used to cut Mississippi off of the

map of the United States. Mississippi was that bad when he was a kid."

There isn't much that seems to be able to alter Jackson's gentle nature and slow manner. He'll talk at you easy and then nail you with that grin. His peers talk highly of him, yet why did it take him so long to stabilize himself in Las Vegas?

Jackson graduated from Morehouse College with a Degree in Political Science, only to return home in the Spring of '73. He worked for the City of Pasadena but knew he wanted to return to Atlanta.

"Atlanta, in all, was just very different. As far as Black folks were concerned, you went from a place where maybe less than 20% of the folks were Black and now you're in a city where maybe more than 70% of the folks are Black.

"Any Black person that tells you 'it doesn't make a difference,' is not telling the truth. You have to get used to having so many of your own people around and in many more cases having positions of authority." His goal motivation was intense as he explained that everyone at Morehouse was filled with dreams of success.

"Being around so many people that had goals and wanted to make something out of themselves was really something. My folks had always tried to impart that to me." Jackson was a fourth generation of his family at Morehouse and what he had heard as a child became reality as a young man.

"Sometimes you're around a lot of guys that are flakes and who aren't really on the ball when you're in high school or junior high. But when you go to a place like Morehouse, everybody there was goal oriented. Even the guy you thought was a clown.

Jackson's return to Atlanta landed him a job at a local TV station as a courier. It was at this job that he had realized there was still a burning desire for broadcasting within him.

He returned to Southern

California and got a brief stint at NBC Studios in Burbank. Being around TV, Jackson found opportunities to loiter around the news room and familiarize himself with the surroundings. Jackson went on a one year excursion to Boston to attend grad school at Emerson College then returned to NBC.

After a short while, Jackson decided he was going to give himself two weeks to drive across the country in his car, stopping in small markets to talk to people that had radio stations in order to sell himself.

It would be in Flagstaff, Arizona that he realized his initial \$200 pocket money would last no longer. He spent seven months on the radio in Flagstaff, then ventured to Durango, Colorado. Four months of playing the role as a DJ wasn't satisfactory for Jackson since sports wasn't involved, so he headed back to Pasadena for what he calls an experiment. Jackson was one of the reporters that would broadcast closed-circuit golf updates at PGA Tournaments.

"It was a good idea," says Jackson, "but it wasn't exactly organized technically and it didn't pan out."

Jackson began advertising himself in Broadcasting Magazine while guiding tours at Universal Studios. His ad sent him to WallaWalla, Washington where he was doing high school and junior college basketball and football for approximately one year. He moved northwest a bit within the state to Yakima for his first shot at play-by-play calling action for American Legion baseball. That continued through the Fall of '79.

Jackson left radio and entered the TV field by taking a news reporter job in Jackson, Mississippi, concurring that he was "just getting (his) foot in the door and occasionally would help out the sports guys," while at the NBC affiliate. He eventually got the Sports Director job at WJTB-CBS TV.

"I saw Jerry Rice practice

and didn't know he was Jerry Rice. He was a kid then. I did a preview on his team's (Miss. Valley St.) prospects for the 1980 season." Jackson has also done interviews with renowned college football coaches Eddie Robinson and Paul "Bear" Bryant.

In 1981 it was time to relocate once again and this time it was Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Jackson spent close to two years, "20 months to be exact," doing nightly sports reporting for the CBS affiliate as the #2 sports anchor. During his tenure in Iowa, Jackson was able to cover the Drake Relays that take place in Des Moines.

It was late 1982 when he decided to head back home to California, taking a job at Metromedia, now known to viewers as the FOX television network.

"I was in the second largest television market in the country and I was on the air 2 or 3 and 4 times a week and it was kind of exciting. The money was better than money had ever been."

Jackson explains that 'ways of the business' separated him from L.A., and eventually, from what he can recall, Channel 13 saw his ad in Broadcasting Magazine.

"As so often happens, people go in different directions; Stations do, and people wind up back out there trying to hook on. I just wound up hooking on (at Channel 13). I had no inclination of being here 9 years. It just happened."

And how does Jackson describe his 'Vegas stop'?

"This is a place where they stage events that people didn't believe could be staged. They brought the ice hockey to the desert and that kind of thing. The huge fights! Stadiums created in parking lots!

"They create things here - it's fascinating! Las Vegas has been a pleasant surprise as opposed to what many would lead you to believe."

When Jackson first came to Las Vegas he was warned by his father that, at the time, the repu-

tation of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department was not exactly pleasant in the way it dealt with and treated minorities.

"I was warned to be very careful around the Police Department here. Apparently this Police Department had a bad reputation.

"I feel about Metro the way I feel about any Police Department. I feel like as long as I act like a good citizen, I have nothing to worry about."

Although he feels that he hasn't contributed enough time, you can occasionally find Jackson heading out to local schools speaking with kids.

"You cannot sell yourself short. You cannot let someone else set the perimeter for your dream. Someone else is always out there who will do that if you let them. The person who does that could easily be the neighborhood pusher.

"Young people should never let anybody else tell them what they can do or what they can be. You have a dream and you can find people who can help you to try to achieve it."


The youth seems to be a bright spot in Jackson's eyes, and that could be linked to the relationship he has built with Amanda, his 2-1/2 year-old daughter.

"My wife works so I have to be with her anyway, but it's not a burden at all. She is a lot of fun.

"Mondays and Tuesdays, my days off, those are the days I try to spend all my time with that little squirt," says Jackson. Jackson reports throughout the week and is in the anchor position on weekends.

Happy with the progress that has taken place in Las Vegas, the 20-year veteran doesn't plan on going any other place, anytime soon.

"I would only want to leave if I could better myself. The people have been really nice to me - the public - people in the streets, no matter where I go, the public has been pretty good to Stephen Jackson."

Bill Nave  saved these kids from drowning, but he's not a lifeguard.



Verleeta Wooten found several new stars, but she's not an astronomer.

And Ivan Neal put out

a lot of fires, but he's not a firefighter.



These are teachers. But to the kids they reach, they're heroes.

BE A TEACHER. BE A HERO.
Call 1-800-45-TEACH.

Have a problem?
ACT NOW!

457-5380

- Air conditioning
- Carburetors
- Tune ups

Call Phil at

ACT AUTOMOTIVE

Complete Auto Repair
Specializing In Smog Problems

Vincent Cancellaro
Owner

3055 E. Fremont St.
Las Vegas, NV 89104

TRIPLEPLAY SPORTSCARDS

FANTASTIC SWAPMEET, BOOTH F-55 & 56
171 SOUTH DECATUR

AUTOGRAPHED PLAQUES (STARS' NAMES: MICHAEL JORDAN, SHAQUILLE O'NEAL, ETC.), COLLECTIBLES.

CALL BILL CRESPO at 871-6035 or 259-2113 (M-F);
JOHN WILLET at 259-2113 (FRI.-SUN.)