

Harvey Rosen

Four friends turn love for hockey into successful radio show

THE SPORTING TOUCH



HARVEY ROSEN

In 2010, radio station CFRW (1290 AM) adopted an all-sports format. Four Jewish boys from Winnipeg have been involved in producing a very popular weekly show focusing on nothing but hockey.

When I reached exuberant spokesperson Ezra Ginsburg, a former student of Kelvin High School who holds an Arts degree from the University of Winnipeg and a Creative Communications diploma from Red River college, it occurred to me that the articulate 28-year-old was either high,

or high on life, or simply young and in love.

Actually, the latter, except no dream girl was involved; rather his amour was an exciting new venture along with his three close buddies who now are into big-time all-sports radio, at 1290 on your AM dial.

The station, CFRW, on the air since 1963, was best known for its popular morning and afternoon shows featuring Don Percy and Raccoon Carney, with a music format featuring primarily songs from yesteryear, dating back to the 50's and 60's.

With a changing demographic, the target audience was no longer to be those who might appreciate the songs of Paul Anka, Roy Orbison, Kay Starr or The Four Aces. Young people today get giddy on sports of all variety at the pro level: baseball, basketball, soccer, football, and hockey, plus the US and Canadian collegiate scene.

Ginsburg, only one of the four lads, all 20-somethings, and not wanting to hog the spotlight by any means, identified the other three who are part of their Saturday morning program (9:00-Noon) known as "The Illegal Curve Hockey Show".

"Richard Pollock, a graduate of the University of Winnipeg Collegiate, is the founder of Illegalcurve.com and is the lead analyst on "The Illegal Curve Hockey Show" on Sports Radio 1290 AM while I am co-analyst," he explained. "He is never one to shy away from a meaningful hockey debate. Richard is an astute observer and scholar of the game who has contributed his voice to 'Puck Prospectus' and ESPN among many others. (On a personal level) Pollock holds a law degree from the University of North Dakota, and has a Political Studies degree from the University of Manitoba. He currently works as a lawyer for Evans Fraser Law Corporation."

Ezra then moved on to Drew Mindell, who graduated from Joseph Wolinsky Collegiate. "He is our host on the show and is a former columnist for Illegalcurve.com (Cold Hard Rants). He is always forthright and loquacious on-air. He holds an advanced degree in Political Studies from the U of M and is a former speechwriter for Liberal MP Anita Neville in Ottawa. He currently works for Perth's Dry Cleaners in Winnipeg.

The youngest of the quartet, at 24, is Michael Remis, who graduated from the University of Winnipeg Collegiate. Ezra describes him thusly: "He is the on-line content producer for the 1290 AM hockey show and is also a former contributor for Illegalcurve.com. Michael brought The Illegal Curve Radio Show to "ustream.tv" and has been responsible for the successful marketing of the show on iTunes and Twitter. He holds a Commerce degree from the U of M and is currently employed by Price Waterhouse Coopers. Remis is enrolled in the CA program."

The show is the brain-child of the life-long Winnipeg friends who initially started out with the hockey site on the internet. Using the concept as a springboard, an agreement was reached to bring their talents and opinions to Red River College's radio station 92.9 KICK FM. While the website remains, the radio show has continued unabated since its inception and was re-branded first as "The Illegal Curve Radio Show", now as "The Illegal Curve Hockey Show."

Not unlike most new endeavours, the boys' beginnings were somewhat humble, but they were fuelled with the kind of youthful passion that can, on occasion, lead to positive outcomes. "We've all been huge hockey fans our entire lives (so much so) that we've travelled to games in other cities." Ginsburg said.

"Basically, how the radio show started was that we began a web site, me and Pollock who actually had the idea. Richard was in North Dakota studying law at the time. We started doing a pod cast and we kind of just took our love of hockey and thought that why shouldn't we be doing this. We're always talking about the guys on CBC."

Between 2007 and 2009 Ezra, the only member of the group to earn a degree in journalism at Red River College, now had access to the institution's radio station KICK-FM 92.9, and the hockey hotshots were now on the airwaves. "We all played a part in starting the radio show in our own way. We would have meetings on a weekly basis. Richard and Drew developed some contacts; so they were more responsible for getting guests and stuff like that.

"For instance, my dad John, who is from Flin Flon, Manitoba, grew up with Bobby Clarke (Hockey Hall of Famer ; now senior VP with the Flyers) and we ended up getting in touch with him. Drew had a friend



From left to right: MICHAEL REMIS, EZRA GINSBURG, RICHARD POLLOCK, DREW MINDELL.

who knew Patrick Sharp with Chicago and the show grew from there. We were just guys who weren't in the media and we kind of developed a name for ourselves."

Other prominent guests soon appeared on "The Illegal Curve Hockey Show", such as former Jets Kris King and Eddie Olczyk, HNIC's Ron MacLean and Kelly Hrudey, plus Theoren Fleury, and several prominent broadcasters and writers.

Ezra also added that the website still exists, but that they don't write on it as much as they used to when they would update it every 10 or 15 minutes.

"We had this goal of being the website that has the most hockey in the world. Now we just kind of focus on the radio show."

When Winnipeg's all-sports station became a reality in the fall of 2010, Ginsburg and the guys adopted the premise that he who hesitates is lost and, in Ezra's words, "We pitched our show to Chris Brook, the program director at 1290, and Chris Steven, who is on the board of CHUM radio. We met with them on two different occasions and put together a package, and they agreed to take us on."

What now? The fellows are all basking in the limelight and, in Ginsburg's words, "All of us want it to go further. We're going on 26 months now (since it all began) because it's a passion for all of us."

The writer, a Jewish Winnipegger, is a former school teacher, and covers football and hockey for Canadian Press and Broadcast News.

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