

Dick Vitale

Dick Vitale, college basketball's top analyst and ambassador, joined ESPN during the 1979-80 season—just after the network's September 1979 launch—following a successful college and pro coaching career. In 2008, Vitale received the sport's ultimate honor when he was selected as an inductee into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

His thorough knowledge of the game is brought forth in an enthusiastic, passionate, sometimes controversial—but never boring—style.

Vitale called ESPN's first-ever major NCAA basketball game—Wisconsin at DePaul on Dec. 5, 1979 (a 90-77 DePaul win). Since then, he's called over a thousand games.

He has been profiled by a wide array of national magazines, ranging from *Sports Illustrated*, *Sport* and *The Sporting News* to *People*, *Playboy* and *Travel & Leisure*. He received eight CableACE nominations, and captured awards in 1994 and 1995.

"I'm living the American dream," Vitale once said. "I learned from my mom and dad, who didn't have a formal education, but had doctorates of love. They told me that if you gave 110 percent all the time, a lot of beautiful things will happen. I may not always be right, but no one can ever accuse me of not having a genuine love and passion for whatever I do. And ESPN has been grateful enough to recognize this."

And while his knowledge, preparation and enthusiasm are unparalleled, his "Vitale-isms" have unwittingly taken on a life of their own. Just a few of his many household phrases: "Awesome, Baby!," "Get a TO, Baby!" (call a timeout), "PTP'er" (prime-time player), "M & M'er" (a mismatch), "Rolls Roycer" (a flat out superstar), "diaper dandy" (freshman star), "All-Windex Performer" (ferocious rebounder) and "Maalox time" (the final minutes of a close game). Vitale credits Hall of Fame broadcaster Jim Simpson, who he teamed with in the early 80's, in helping him develop his broadcast style.

But Vitale's roots are in teaching the game he's loved since a child. Following college, he got a job teaching at Mark Twain Elementary School (Garfield, N.J.) and coaching junior high school football and basketball. He began coaching at the high school level at Garfield High School, where he coached for one season (1963-64). He then earned four state sectional championships, two consecutive state championships, and 35 consecutive victories during his seven years at his alma mater—East Rutherford, NJ, High School (1964-70). He joined Rutgers University for two years (1970-72) as an assistant coach, helping to recruit Phil Sellers and Mike Dabney, two cornerstones on an eventual NCAA Final Four team (1976).

Vitale then coached at the University of Detroit (1973-77), compiling a winning percentage of .722 (78-30), which included a 21-game winning streak during the 1976-77 season when the team participated in the NCAA Tournament. Included in the streak was a victory in Milwaukee over Al McGuire's eventual national champion Marquette team. In April 1977, Vitale was named Athletic Director at Detroit and later that year was named the United Fund's Detroit Man of the Year. In May 1978, he was named head coach of the NBA's Detroit Pistons, which he coached during the 1978-79 season prior to joining ESPN.

Vitale is also quite the philanthropist. He's on the Board of Directors of The V Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to finding a cure for cancer and founded in 1993 by ESPN and the late Jim Valvano (an organization which has since raised over \$130 million for cancer research). He has co-chaired with Mike Krzyzewski and John Saunders the annual V Foundation Golf Classic and hosts an annual V Foundation Gala in Florida which gathers numerous celebrities to raise money and honor individuals such as Krzyzewski, Bob Knight and Pat Summitt.

For many years he's awarded five scholarships annually to the Boys & Girls Club of Sarasota (Fla.). His involvement with the organization was highlighted in April 1999 with the "Dick Vitale Sports Night," an annual banquet that has raised more than \$600,000. In April 2000, in recognition of Vitale's support for the Boys and Girls Club, it was announced that a new building would be named The Dick Vitale Physical Education and Health Training Center. Vitale was inducted into the Sarasota's Boys and Girls Club Hall of Fame at the 2001 Dinner. In 2002, *Sarasota* magazine named him one of the area's most influential citizens.

He participates on selection committees for both the Naismith and Wooden Awards and is a member of *The Associated Press* voting panel for the Top-25. He is also a voter for the Hall of Fame's Bob Cousy Awards.

And Vitale is a popular figure even outside of sports television. He's made cameo appearances in several movies as himself: *The Naked Gun: From The Files of Police Squad!* (1988, starring Leslie Nielsen), *Hoop Dreams* (1994 award-winning documentary), *Blue Chips* (1994, Nick Nolte), *The Sixth Man* (1997, Marlon Wayans and Kadeem Hardison), *He Got Game* (1998, Denzel Washington and Ray Allen) and *Love and Basketball* (2000). In 1995's *Jury Duty* with Pauly

Shore and Tia Carrere, he played “Hal Gibson.” And in 1992, he teamed with Jim Valvano to play furniture movers (“V&V Movers”) on the hit series *The Cosby Show*.

He was even the subject of a David Letterman Top-10 list—“Top Ten Signs Dick Vitale Is Nuts!”— in 1996—where he even read the list on the show (a couple of gems: “I’ve referred to everything as baby, except an actual baby” and “I keep repainting the roof of my house to match Dennis Rodman’s hair”). In March 1999, HBO’s *Real Sports* profiled Vitale.

Vitale’s also authored several books, the most recent of which— *It’s Awesome, Baby!: 75 Years of Memories and a Lifetime of Opinions on the Game I Love*.

Vitale graduated from Seton Hall University with a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration. He also earned a master’s degree in education from William Paterson College and has 32 graduate credits beyond the master’s degree in administration.

A few of Vitale’s recent prestigious honors: In 2000, Vitale was recognized with the NABC Cliff Wells Appreciation Award for outstanding service to the college basketball coaching community and college basketball in general, and in 2001, the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) presented him with the Jake Wade Award, for contributions to college athletics and in 2008, CoSIDA honored Vitale with the prestigious Keith Jackson Eternal Flame Award given to an individual who, or an organization which, has made a lasting contribution to intercollegiate athletics, has demonstrated a long and consistent commitment to excellence and has been a loyal supporter of CoSIDA and its mission.

In 2002, the Florida Association of Community Corrections presented him with their President’s Humanitarian Award for his work with young people, while in 2003, Vitale was honored with the first-ever Ethics and Sportsmanship in Sports Media Award given by the Institute for International Sport, as well as the National Pathfinder Award, co-presented by Indiana Sports Corporation and Indiana Black Expo, to individuals who have demonstrated a dedicated commitment to improving the lives of America’s youth. In 2008, he was selected as the recipient of the 2008 Naismith Men’s Outstanding Contributor to Basketball (pays tribute to individuals who made a significant impact on college basketball).

In addition, he’s been selected for 17 halls of fame: (See Hall of Fame list below) in addition to being selected as the NSAA Sportscaster of the Year in 2013.

Born in East Rutherford, NJ, Vitale and his wife, Lorraine, have two daughters, Terri and Sherri, who both attended Notre Dame on tennis scholarships, and who both graduated with MBAs. The Vitale’s proud involvement with Notre Dame includes the endowment of the Dick Vitale Family Scholarship, presented annually to an Irish undergraduate who participates in Notre Dame sports or activities and does not receive financial aid. Recipients have included the school’s Leprechaun mascot, cheerleaders and band members.

HALLS OF FAME:

1. Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame
2. NABC Hall of Fame (National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame)
3. University of Detroit Hall of Fame
4. National Italian Hall of Fame
5. Florida Sports Hall of Fame
6. Little League Hall of Excellence
7. Five Star Basketball Camp Hall of Fame
8. Elwood Park, NJ Hall of Fame
9. East Rutherford High School Hall of Fame
10. Boys and Girls Club of Sarasota Hall of Fame
11. Sarasota Community Archives Hall of Fame
12. New Jersey Hall of Fame 2016
13. NSAA – Sportscaster of the Year 2013
14. Court of Honor as Man of the Year – NABC (National Assn of Basketball Coaches)
15. Vince Lombardi UNICO – 2014 - Man of the Year
16. American Cancer Society – 2014 - Man of the Year
17. Seton Hall University – 2014 - Humanitarian of the Year

Special Awards:

2011:

Tampa Bay Sports Commission – “Life Time Achievement Award”

2012:

Health Care Heroes – “Philanthropist of the Year”

PARC – 13 Magnetic Men of 2012 Award

2015:

AutoZone Liberty Bowl Distinguished Citizen Award

2017:

John Wooden Citizenship Cup