

## **Profile: Sacramento Kings broadcaster Jerry Reynolds**

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A lot has changed with the Sacramento Kings since their arrival here in 1985. The team has lived a roller coaster of failure and success, gradually evolving from the NBA's version of a Siberian gulag into one of its most respected franchises. Along the way, players, coaches, owners and even arenas have come and gone with regularity. But Jerry Reynolds has been a notable exception to that revolving door process, a constant through all of the good, the bad and the ugly.

New Kings fans primarily know Reynolds as the team's color commentator on TV broadcasts. For them, the ever-affable Reynolds is the wise-cracking yin to play-by-play announcer Grant Napear's straight man yang, the guy as likely to point out the flaws in a player's haircut as his inability to shoot free throws. But fans old enough to remember the original Sacramento Kings with equal parts revulsion and nostalgia know Reynolds has been so much more than that during his two-decade tenure.

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"My talent is that I am a role player," Reynolds says of his longevity. "From a team standpoint, I like to think I'm like a [former King super-sub] Bobby Jackson. I can be valuable in a lot of different ways."

He's definitely had the chance to prove that theory. Reynolds has had more incarnations than Madonna during his 20-year Kings career – assistant coach (twice), head coach (twice), general manager and director of player personnel to name a few. He has also crossed over to the women's game, serving six years as the general manager of the defending WNBA champion Sacramento Monarchs, a team he was primarily responsible for building. Add the 100-plus speaking engagements and team-promotions he does every year to his TV work, and it is easy to see why to many fans, Reynolds is as synonymous with the goings on at Arco Arena as the game night traffic jams on Del Paso Road.

Reynolds, 61, says his current gig is the most fun he has had in game. After all, he says, what could be better than getting paid to talk about the sport that has been his life?

"For me, broadcasting is a labor of love," he says. "I probably like this better than anything I've ever done."

He says a big part of the fun has been working with Napear. At first blush, Napear - the lanky New York native with an often abrasive, in-your-face style – and Reynolds, the vertically challenged and polite-to-a-fault Hoosier from rural Indiana seem like the ultimate odd couple. But, as with many things, appearances can deceive. Over the last decade, the duo has formed one of the best broadcasting teams in the league, with Reynolds' insider observations a perfect compliment to Napear's staccato rendering of game action.

“He has a way of putting things into layman’s terms,” Napear says. “He makes things very easy to understand. I’m biased, but I think he has become one of the best color commentators in the game. It didn’t happen overnight, but he’s become a real pro.”

Napear is also quick to note that Reynolds’ country charm is far more blessing than curse on the broadcasts.

“He is what he is, which the fans really love and appreciate,” says Napear. “He does not try to hide that he is a country bumpkin.”

Reynolds notes with a laugh that Napear’s style took some getting used to for him as well.

“I always say Grant is like coffee. He’s an acquired taste,” says Reynolds. “But I’m happy to say I have acquired it.”

That cutting wit – often at his own expense – has become his trademark, in many ways defining him as much as all of the rest of his Kings duties combined. He has, for instance, joked often over the years that he is the “second most famous person from French Lick, Indiana,” the hometown of NBA legend Larry Bird, an “aw shucks” self deprecation that has lent mightily to his “bumpkin” image. Reynolds accepts the moniker now with ease, but that wasn’t always the case.

“I certainly don’t apologize for it like I used to,” he say. “Like a lot of people, I was sort of ashamed and felt inferior due to my background. But as I got older I realized there was no reason to be ashamed. I came from good family and good people. They were just country people.”

Reynolds actually grew up about five miles outside of French Lick. His father worked as a laborer, shoveling coal to earn a paycheck and farming a bit on the side. It was a meager existence, and he and his two younger brothers grew up with precious few of the amenities most of us these days take for granted.

“We had an outhouse and we didn’t have running water,” he says. “We did have electricity, but not in every room. The first two grades of school that I went to, the school did not have electricity and did not have indoor plumbing. We had an outhouse at school.”

When Reynolds was 9-years-old, his dad got a steady job working on a natural gas pipeline for the Texas Eastern Natural Gas Company, which had a plant in French Lick. The new job gave the Reynolds family the financial wherewithal to move up in the world, including moving into a new house with indoor plumbing and full electricity. They also bought their first television, giving the inquisitive young Jerry his first view of a world outside of the flat fields of Indiana and starting him thinking that he might want a different life.

As with most Hoosiers, he was also developing his lifetime love affair with basketball. He was good at the game, enough so that he soon began to see it as a way to achieve his long-term goal of becoming a teacher. At 18, a basketball scholarship to Vincennes Junior College made him the first member of his family to go to college. He did well enough there to draw the interest of a few bigger colleges, but a horrific car accident that left him with a serious back injury took that option away. He transferred to Oakland City College on a basketball scholarship anyway, but since he was unable to play, he agreed to coach the freshman basketball team in order to keep his scholarship.

By the time he graduated in 1966, coaching was in his blood. He returned to Vincennes, leading them to the 1970 junior college national championship. A Division II national championship at West Georgia University followed in 1974. He eventually took a coaching job at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, a school far better known for its high academic standards than its athletic achievements. The team developed into a nationally ranked unit on his watch, something that caught the attention of more than just students and alumni.

In 1984, the then-Kansas City Kings held their workouts at Rockhurst, but they were already in the planning stages of relocating to Sacramento. Head coach Phil Johnson invited Reynolds to join his staff and move west with the team. Although he had not grown up with even the slightest aspiration to be in the NBA, he jumped at the opportunity to be part of the game at its highest level.

That decision has clearly paid off for both him and the franchise. Although he stepped down from his general manager position a year ago, he says he is still especially proud of the Monarchs' 2005 WNBA title because he brought so many of the key players to the team, including stars Yolanda Griffith and Ticha Penicheiro. He also notes wistfully that it was the only time in his Sacramento tenure that he felt like he was allowed to really build a team the way he wanted to.

"It wasn't like with the Kings where somebody was always scrutinizing everything I did," he says. "I could do it how I wanted to do it. Once I learned the league, I felt I could do it pretty well, and I think I did."

His fondness for the women's game was born in part out of his years of teaching Basketball 101, seminars the Kings put on for their season ticket holders.

"As far as fans who really wanted to learn the game, the majority invariably were women," he recalls. "I found them to be better students. They would listen better. Men had the tendency to act like they already had all the answers, while women were more attentive and asked better questions."

That affinity for teaching has tempted him at times to consider going back to the college game, but he doubts that will happen now. His Kings contract is up at the end of this year and he is not sure what will happen from here. He put out a book last fall detailing his

two decades of Kings experiences, and he hopes to stick around long enough to see at least one year in a new Kings arena. That said, retirement is clearly becoming an option.

Dodie, his wife of 37 years, scoffs at that prospect. As with many NBA spouses, she learned early on that basketball was all consuming for the people inside the game, and that Jerry was no different. Unlike many, however, she kept her distance from the game, never allowing it or her famous husband to define who she was. A teacher herself with a master's degree in special education, Dodie wonders if her husband will ever really be ready to walk away from the game.

"I don't know about retirement. I don't think he'd handle it very well," she says. "I think he'd be climbing the walls in about two months."

Napear also notes Reynolds' hectic schedule on behalf of the Kings, and doubts he will be ready any time soon to cool off his long-time love affair with the fans.

"He's a guy that you want around. He's a positive influence, he's funny and he is easy to talk to," Napear says. "I think he also really knows his role in this community, and he cherishes that role. The Kings are lucky to have him here."

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