



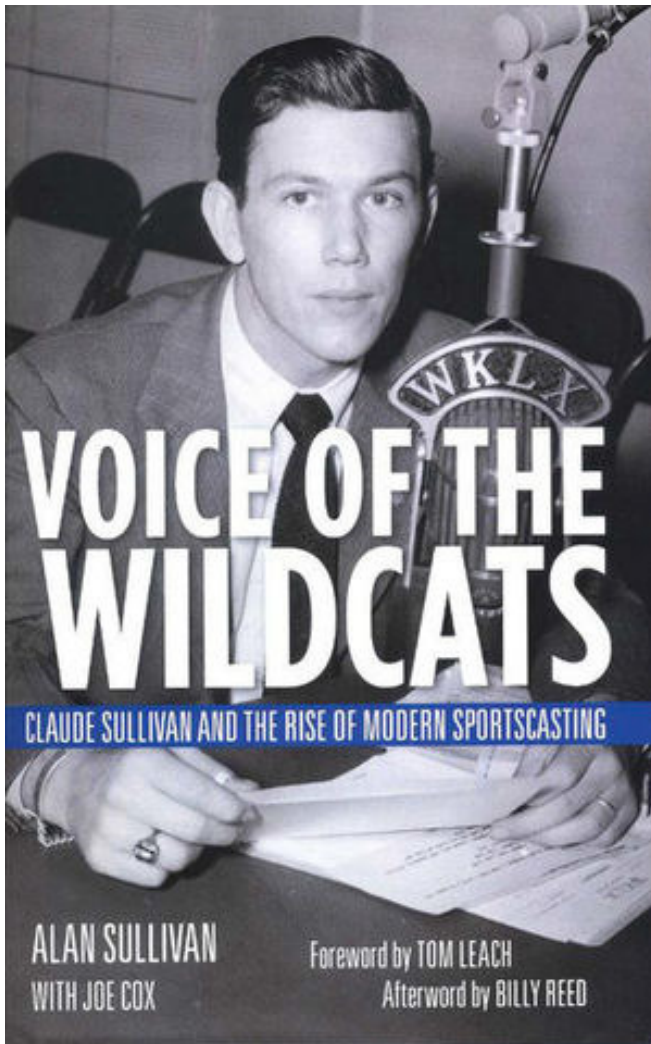
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DAILY NEWS

Book a trip down memory lane

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"Voice of the Wildcats: Claude Sullivan and the Rise of Modern Sportscasting" by Alan Sullivan with Joe Cox. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014, 306 pages, \$29.95.



“What Claude experienced as life is now, for the most part, history, “Alan Sullivan and Joe Cox explain near the beginning of “Voice of the Wildcats: Claude Sullivan and the Rise of Modern Sportscasting,” their new volume on the life and career of Claude Sullivan, the celebrated Kentucky Wildcats radio announcer. “Step back into that history and get to know Claude Sullivan – the man, the father, the businessman, the friend, the broadcasting legend.”

Alan Sullivan, Claude’s son, is a healthcare architect. Cox is an attorney and co-author of “100 Things Wildcats Fans Should Know and Do Before They Die.” “Voice of the Wildcats” is extensively researched; much of the source material for the book, including broadcasts from many of the games referenced in the narrative, exclusive interviews with Adolph Rupp and Governor A.B. “Happy” Chandler, and several related radio programs from the era, can be accessed at www.VoiceoftheWildcatsBook.com.

In addition to the twenty-eight audio clips from several of the Sullivan’s original broadcasts embedded in the enhanced digital version of the book, the authors also give the more traditional

reader a pretty good understanding of why Sullivan was so revered in his profession by including excerpts from transcripts of those broadcasts. For example, consider the following passage from his coverage of the Kentucky-Tennessee game in Lexington near the end of the 1953 football season:

“Good afternoon, football fans everywhere, from Stoll Field on the campus of the University of Kentucky in Lexington – where the skies are perfectly clear with not a cloud in sight, brilliant sunshiny day, where the fans here on the southern side of a jam-packed Stoll Field and McLean Stadium in the shade with coats on and across the way in the sun-bathed northern side of the stadium many, many fans in shirt sleeves for the big game this afternoon. Because this is it!

Kentucky versus Tennessee – a game that comes once a year and packs a wallop of Christmas. It has been the same story since 1893, a gridiron rivalry that carries more color, more glory, more prestige than any football game around the country... Everyone here this afternoon is doggedly pulling for Kentucky or Tennessee. We imagine there are very few fans in the stadium that are just looking for a good football game, and the prize to the winner will probably be their pick of the Cotton or the Sugar Bowl.”

Honestly, as you read those words, it seems as though you are almost magically transported back to a different time. Such was Sullivan’s ability to bring the experience to life for those who were only able to listen to the game with family and friends on a small box in the corner of the living room. In many respects, Sullivan’s style of broadcasting is a dying art. It is easy to forget that radio was the dominant medium for decades before television made visual images ubiquitous. Without the benefit of being able to actually see the action on the field (or on the court), the announcer had to literally paint a mental picture for his or her listeners. And, from all accounts, Sullivan was a master when it came to his craft.

Wildcat fans everywhere will enjoy the trip down memory lane that Sullivan and Cox have so eloquently constructed. One especially endearing feature of the book is the inclusion of several vintage photographs scattered liberally throughout the introduction and thirteen chapters that comprise the main text. These serve to bring the story of Sullivan’s unique place in the history of broadcasting to life in a way that would have not been possible otherwise. Moreover, it can often appear to the uninformed that the evolution of college sports was a seamless progression from then to now. As the authors make abundantly clear, however, this is only an illusion. Sports have always been a force for social change, although the exact nature of that metamorphosis is often the subject of intense discussion and debate. Witness how the authors challenge long-held beliefs about the supposed biases of Adolph Rupp, who the announcer interacted with on an almost daily basis:

“Conspicuously absent from the recording in the historical aftermath of this game is Rupp’s alleged racism,” Sullivan and Cox note in “The View from on Top,” the eleventh chapter. “The matchup between the white Wildcats and the mostly African American Miners is one that Disney deigned to moralize in its 2006 film ‘Glory Road,’ which was only very, very loosely based on the truth. Revisionist history certainly has its flaws. If Kentucky had lost the semifinal to an all-white Duke team, would the Blue Devils have been branded scheming racists as the movie brands Rupp?”

“Neither Alyce Sullivan, reflecting over her husband’s friendship and business dealings with Rupp, nor David Sullivan, present at center court at the game in question, recalls any racist remarks or tendencies from Rupp – or, according to David, any unusual tension in the air at the game, not to mention any Rebel flags being waved at the game, which Disney added in a particularly heavy-handed dose of inaccuracy,” they continue. “Claude was used to players of various races and nationalities. Had he believed Rupp to be the type of man later characterized by ‘Glory Road’ and other would-be historians, their friendship would most likely not have held up.”

When Claude Sullivan passed away of throat cancer at the relatively young age of forty-two in 1967, I was in the third grade at Waverly Elementary School. Still, after reading this heartfelt and engaging tribute to his life and accomplishments, I feel I have a fairly intimate sense of who he was and why he was loved by so many. I believe most readers will come to a similar place after reading “Voice of the Wildcats.” This one is worth adding to your personal collection.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*