

127. You Gotta Love It: Remembering Dave Nitz

Teddy Allen 00:00

Teddy, hey everybody. I'm Teddy Allen with Louisiana Tech and today, we're here to talk about one of our favorite subjects, Dave Nitz. For 50 years, he was the voice of the Bulldogs. You know him as we did playfully as Freeway Dave. We'll talk about that more as we go along. We're here with a new friend and an older friend, and me, I've known Dave since around 19 well, not since around 1978 since 1978 hard to believe that was just four years after he arrived. We lost Dave on June the 24th at age 82 if you're listening to this on Thursday July 10, you're listening to this on Dave Nitz is what it would have been his 83rd birthday. He was born July the 10th, 1942 and we miss him, and it's sad, but it's fun talking about Freeway, Freeway Dave, just thinking about him now in my head and things he would do and say and eat. We'll get into all that. One of his old friends, Malcolm Butler, you're just briefly before we start telling Dave stories. Your relationship with Dave?

Malcolm Butler 01:25

Well, you know, my relationship started when I was seven, eight years old, and it was just as a listener, right? I mean, I would, I'd lay in bed, supposed to be going to sleep, would turn the radio on under the covers and listening to Dave. I'd have my notebook, and I'd be keeping my own stats of the basketball game or whatever. And I guess I didn't really ever meet Dave until high school, and I went to school with Jay and Jeff, his two sons at Ruston high and got to know him a little bit. But obviously, once I took the role as the SI D at Louisiana Tech back in the late 90s, that's when my relationship with Dave really took to a new level, and he became a friend, but have always had, obviously a lot of respect for Dave, and he was instrumental in my broadcasting career, which spurned out of nowhere just Jim oaks calling me and saying, Hey, you're the next broadcaster for the lady texters. And so who did I turn to for advice? I turned to Dave Nitz.

Teddy Allen 02:22

my guess is that he said The only advice he gave you was they can't see you nod your head on the radio.

Malcolm Butler 02:28

He said that, and he said you can never say the score or the time too many times.

Teddy Allen 02:33

Freeway Dave Nitz, you're not the only kid who laid in bed and listened to freeway for years and years. A newer friend. Chris Kennedy, Chris, your relationship with freeway Dave?

Chris Kennedy 02:42

Very much like Malcolm's. My dad, he listened to a lot of games, pretty much any away football games, back when we were in the whack So playing in Utah, playing in Nevada, California, and getting to listen to Dave call football games was really exciting, and never really thought or expected that I was going to meet him one day, and was fortunate to have that experience.

Teddy Allen 03:13

Chris literally wrote the book on Dave. It came out a few months ago. Dave Nitz, you can get a copy just email us up here at the university communications@latech.edu we'll make sure Chris gets that and we hook you up freeway Dave came from West Virginia, again, born in 1942 son of a steel mill work worker. He married Marlene, and when they moved here, told her they would be here a couple of years, and they would move on. And, of course, Dave, that was the first of many fibs that he told in Ruston, because he stayed here for 50 years. Your first memories, besides hearing him on the radio, Malcolm, your first memories of freeway, Dave, once you got to know him

Malcolm Butler 03:56

gosh, yeah, um, you know, gosh, there's so many of them, and so many different stories. And, you know, when I think about Dave, you know, I think one of the stories, and maybe it's not my first teddy but when we went to Huntington, West Virginia, anytime we were going to West Virginia, Dave was like a kid in a candy store, right? He was going back home. You know, Rustin might have been home for 50 years, but West Virginia was his real home, and we went back in 15 or 16 for that CSA championship football game against Marshall, and he made us all get up at like 430 in the morning. If you remember, it was us, Timo Benny, and we drove to Milton, which was his hometown. It was probably, what about a 45 minute drive, something like that. And we ate breakfast, and kind of a hole in the wall there in Milton, some of Dave's old high school buddies showed up, and it was it was fun being a fly on the wall and just listening to them talk about Dave, tell Dave stories. I think Dave was the resident bookie back in high school. Correct from what some of those. Stories were told, but the food was really greasy, but the company was great. And then when we were done, we actually drove by his house where he grew up, and it was just a small house up on a hill. Dave told stories about he had his little basketball goal. Dave always thought he was a basketball player. You know, he could shoot the rock, according to Dave, but there was a huge hill, and so he'd be shooting the ball would roll all the way down the hill, across the street, down another hill, towards the barn. And so anyhow, it was really fun to kind of go back and see where Dave grew up.

Teddy Allen 05:32

In that little diner that morning. There was a little bitty Christmas tree over in the corner, and the lady waiting on us was exactly what you would think. But it was a terrible place to you said we ate breakfast, and we didn't mean you looked at the Timo ate all of his. He ate all he was not bothered by, oh, it's the greatest. And he really did. He liked grease. The breakfast was really, really good. Oh, it was brutal. And what a great day. I'm still waiting on there to be any color in West Virginia. All at times we've been with trips. It looks like living in a sepia tone. But it was a great when all those guys walked in. It's been 60 years since some of them seen each other. Hey, they were all together again. They were talking about tout sheets from the high school way back in the day, big foam hats on gave Dave a Milton I think they're the Milton greyhounds. Gave him a Milton hat. What a great weekend for everybody, Chris, when you first met Dave and this book adventure started tell us about that

Chris Kennedy 06:28

Well, one story to piggyback off of Malcolm's story of him, his early basketball days at his house. He also got his broadcasting experience started at the same time he would pretend like it was the Lakers and Celtics Jerry. Jerry West was one of his favorite Lakers players, and he would always pretend like Jerry West 15 seconds left, 10 seconds left, five seconds left. Boom, three pointer. He wins the game, stuff like that. But apparently it wasn't very good, because he said that on it was only his dogs that were there to listen.

Teddy Allen 07:11

He ended up being a big dog guy. You know, everybody's ever listened to Dave call a game when Jake was alive? Yeah, who was one of those little shrunken down Collie dogs, Shelties, I love Jake. And there was a country song came out, feed Jake. And he said, every radio broadcast, yeah, I've just asked Marlene if something happens to me, just feed Jake. You know, he wanted to go out feet first. He made no bombs about it. He in His in the book Chris, who literally wrote the book on him. He quoted Harry Carey saying, Harry Carey said, I want him to take me out of the press box the broadcast booth feet first. Eddie danger made it his last game was last June of 24 up in Fayetteville, and the Bulldogs were playing in the Arkansas regional. They lost. That was Dave's last game. And really, by October, it had got really tough on him with arthritis. And then he had diabetes for years, of course, and so that couldn't really fight the arthritis that much, and, and, and then some dimension, you just couldn't get any traction. So that's he. He almost went out feet first. And I'll be the first to say, and Malcolm, we've had this discussion a lot. Kind of wanted him to retire four or five years ago. If you saw him try to get from point A to point B, it would hurt you if you knew him a long time. But in retrospect, that's what he wanted to do. He wasn't going to paint, he wasn't going to sculpt anything. He didn't play golf. He never went to the movies. He saw three in his life. He hadn't read a book since he graduated from college, which he promised Marlene wouldn't read a book, and once he got out of college, and he kept that promise, but you saw him struggling, and yet, once he got to the box, that's where he wanted to be. Can you illustrate that, some more Malcolm, what I'm trying to explain, I know that's what he wanted to be doing. And right up until the end,

Malcolm Butler 09:07

you know, and tech fans, they didn't, all they cared about is they heard Dave knits his voice, right? You know, as Father Time is going to do to all of us, his eyesight wasn't as good. He might not have been as sharp, but it was his voice, and that's all they cared about. And I think, you know, Louisiana Tech athletics recognized Dave that last weekend of the regular season last year. I think it was senior weekend, and we brought him down on the field. Brad Petes had a golf cart for him and and I had so many people after that comment to me, they didn't realize how much he was struggling to get around, because all they knew is they heard his voice, and his voice was still strong, the the vocal cords were still there and and he was the voice of the Bulldogs. But you're right, those last few years, you know what? He saw it start to happen, probably during COVID, right? Just a lot of different things. But he just did not want, he didn't want to give up. He talked to kept talking about 50 years, 50 years, I want to get to 50 Years and and to his credit, he got to 50 years.

Teddy Allen 10:15

And he would have got to 51 or 60, had Father Time allowed him to do that. I mean, right, I wrote in the newspaper that there was, you could still see the little boy in him when he got in the radio booth. Whether it was whatever stadium we might be at, are any the one of the Dave knits booths here on campus, there's one at football, there's one at the love shag. But he did love ball, and I'll always be grateful that, until time robbed him of it and just couldn't do it no more that he was shared that little boy, Dave, with everybody. And I promise you, if you heard his voice and you're listening on the radio, you were exactly who he wanted to be speaking to, and he was exactly where he wanted to be talking from. And and it's the last end of the era. Is it not guys that nobody will do that for 50 Years anymore? There's too much travel, there's too many games, too many other opportunities, probably, to keep somebody there 50 years. It just, it's, he's the last of a dying and really special breed. Chris, when you were doing the book, what are some? Were two, three things that stood out to you that maybe have been odd or surprising when you were studying the the aura, that is, that is Freeway Dave

Chris Kennedy 11:33

just all of the other like non sports opportunities that he did in radio. There was a livestock show. I never thought someone would broadcast that on the radio, but in Arkansas, when he was at Arkansas Tech, he broadcasted a livestock show and Tom T Hall in West Virginia. Before he got his career going, he actually left the radio station that Dave was at and he was going to go to Nashville. He got in some disagreements with the general manager at the radio station and basically told Dave, I'm going to Nashville. And Dave was kind of like, Oh yeah, sure, whatever. And then, sure enough, that's where his career got going.

Teddy Allen 12:19

Worked out pretty good for Tom T Hall

Malcolm Butler 12:22

and for Dave Nitz, worked out good for Dave Nitz.

Teddy Allen 12:25

If you get the book, the pictures of Dave back in the 50s in his little football costume aren't his basketball outfit. It's worth the price of admission. I'm telling you, it's he was a good player too. He was, he was a good players, a good Milton Greyhound well.

Malcolm Butler 12:41

And you know, you mentioned some of the other events he did, and I don't remember the details, Teddy, you may know it better. He broadcast a golf tournament one time. And if I remember how the story went, and correct me if I'm wrong, they had him in a golf cart, and Dave didn't know anything about golf, and he's riding around. And he finally got kicked out of the golf course because he drove the golf cart up on the green, which obviously you're not allowed to do on a golf course.

Chris Kennedy 13:08

He was going to talk to the winner, that's what it was. And then he got kicked off because it was sacred ground, and he had no idea.

Teddy Allen 13:15

And if he were here right now, he would look at you like he always did when you tell that story. He said, "I didn't know," like, it's still stupid of you not being able to drive a golf cart up onto the green. He still didn't understand it.

Malcolm Butler 13:27

You know, we, gosh, back in 2000 and help me out. Teddy 1316, we had a we had a pregame show for football, and I was doing sideline at the time, and it was a home game and South Carolina State I can remember that season, and we had a lightning storm that came through, and that pre game show literally turned into about four and a half hours. It was supposed to be an hour, hour and a half, and we'd never sent it back to the station, because there are other affiliates that were down the line that wouldn't have known. And so we stayed on the air that entire time, while we waited out the lightning delay. I don't think we kicked off till about 1130 midnight, something like that that night. And we told story after story after story. And you know, one of my favorite, Dave knit stories, and obviously statute of limitations have run out on this, but he always told it himself, and he loved it, but he worked in the Sports Information Office with Keith Prince when he first started tech. He handled klpi, the radio station on campus. He was very proud of that as well. But, you know, Dave, Dave liked to gamble at times, and Dave had a bookie that he was betting through, and so he would pick up the phone and call, was it Benny the bookie? I think it was Benny the bookie. And call Benny the bookie. Well, one day he picked up the phone to call Benny the bookie, and somebody else answered, and they were like, Yeah, Benny's sick, you know, we're taking so they said, All right, well, here are my here are my games, and here's what I want to bet in the end. He said, Now, my name's Dave Nitz. N-I-T-Z. Well, sure enough. About an hour or so. Later, he's in his office there at Tech, and here come the police, because they had basically, that was a cop on the other end of the line, and so Dave had basically placed his illegal bet with the police, and so they came up there. They were actually not out there to get Dave. I think they were up there. They were more after Benny the bookie, but that is such a comical story. And what made it even funnier was Marlene was working at the police department in Ruston at the time, so little bit of trouble with the law.

Teddy Allen 15:34

She was like the police chief secretary and Mr. Keith Prince, God love him. The patience of Job. I was there. I was this graduate assistant. And Bill Campbell used to cover the Rangers now in Johns, where he was a student assistant. Tom Burnett was fixing to be over there all the time. I don't think he was there yet, but, I mean, it involved. It was a massive ring over attack, assistant coach, and it was a little pilling things. I remember Dave's bet was Fairmont State, and somebody was the big one. He could not wait to get on that night. And the beautiful part of that story is that he spelled his name for the authorities. I want to make sure you get this right in

Malcolm Butler 16:12

it only three way day. That's

Teddy Allen 16:15

what made it so funny, and he couldn't understand why they were mad, and they ended up getting the money back from Benny the book. It's a it's a sordid tale. But there's that night we talked about that five

and a half hours, I would always bring a big stack of stuff, and course, they made fun of me, and I said, Well, someday we may need this. And we went all the way through it, but most of it was just telling Dave stories. We had people texting in questions. You gotta love it. And, you know, he worked on that, and then it just came out of nowhere one day to him. And anyway, that was, that was a beautiful night. That was a beautiful night and a lot of people got to learn a lot of stuff about Dave that they, including us, they didn't know before we mentioned Dave was a wonderful ball player, and used to be shirts and skins games, games, first Memorial, then over attack. Course. Leon barmore would get some of that and and Dave, who never saw a shot he didn't like he would just shoot till his hands bleed. He was a wonderful shirts and skins player. Chris, a story about, I think you got a story about Coach bar more and freeway. Dave,

Chris Kennedy 17:19

this is probably my most favorite story that I heard with Dave. But he and Coach barmore Were going to a lady texter game at Northern Northern Arizona, and that's in Flagstaff, and Karl Malone was playing for the jazz they were playing in Phoenix. So they went to watch the game, and it starts snowing, which it never does in Arizona. So it was a big deal. They told everyone, the announcers inside the stadium, hey, it's snowing outside. Everyone went to the nearest window, forgot the game. We're looking at the snow. Coach bar more tells Dave, hey, maybe we should start heading back. And Dave's like, no, it's fine. Well, the game's over, and it was not fine. The interstate was actually closed as they were going back to Flagstaff. And the police tell him, if you have chains, you can go, but if you don't, if the road's closed. And he tells them, well, I'm from West Virginia. And they tell him, I don't care where you're from. If you don't have chains, you're not going any further. And so they had to get off the interstate. They're going on back roads in the middle of the mountains, middle of nowhere. And eventually they find a place. They go to the motel. They're wading through snow. And in a previous speaking engagement, I kind of exaggerated. I said it was like knee deep or waist deep. It wasn't quite that deep, but it was deep enough they were wading through the snow. The heat never came on. Somehow they made it through the night without freezing to death. They get back in their car, they're driving and, you know, barely missing falling off the cliff and falling and never being heard from ever again. Well, eventually they make it to Flagstaff. They do the lay texters game and the latex ers go back to tech, and Dave is trying to get back to Phoenix so he can catch a plane to Arkansas for the men's basketball team. And same thing he gets to where it's closed. Do you have chains? No, I don't. So back through the mountains, and eventually he makes it. Somehow, he made it to the men's basketball game in Little Rock the next day.

Teddy Allen 19:39

Magically, he did always end up where he was supposed to be. And he bailed people out of I remember Nico van thine was the backup. Was the color guy for centenary basketball, and the Bulldogs and the lady texters were up in Madison Square Garden or something. Mika thought he was going to have to call the game. And he'd ask, Dave, can you get across town? And. Minutes before the game starts, here comes Dave. Totally confident. I talked to Nico on the phone the other night, and he told me this story again. Dave sets down, I gotcha, and takes off. And if you're doing play by play, guys like Dave Malcolm, you make they make it look easy. It's not. It's difficult to get some little traction and kind of know what's going on. This moves very fast down there, and Nico's looking around. There's no one in Madison Square Garden to help him. He's on an island. Only one guy can help him. Here comes

freeway Dave. Chris was talking about, hey, I'm from West Virginia. We've heard him say that 10,000 times. Totally confident. Your experience with him once Google Maps came along, versus the Atlas? How many arguments? Just give us a brief

Malcolm Butler 20:46

Dave thought that he didn't need Google. Of course, he didn't walk he had a flip phone, right? So Dave was never going to use GPS. But yeah, there were numerous times we'd be on road trips in a van, going to wherever we were going. And you know, GPS would tell us one thing, and Dave would get into an argument with GPS, that we were supposed to go the other way, and was just dead set. And it was usually about a 5050, proposition on whether Dave was going to be correct or wrong. But, but that story is kind of the great illustration of Dave. He was a stubborn gentleman, you know he would, he would argue with that wall right there. And I mean, how many times would you know he we were trying to get into, like, media parking or get closer to drop him off, and either security around the stadium, and we simply refused to let Dave roll down his window because he was going to get into an argument with that police officer about whether we could get in there or not. He did not smooth talk anybody. He was a bull in a china shop. There

Teddy Allen 21:46

wasn't a buffer, no, there was no buffer there where he could sweet talk. You haven't lived usually, I'm driving the van, and he's in the passenger seat, and so you roll down the driver's side window to talk to a nice young kid who's taking up parking pass, and you're fixing to say, sir. And also, in this booming West Virginia, that voice everybody else loves, it's haunting, and it's just hollering at the kid, hey, where would the print like everybody knows, just let us. And he was, he was stubborn that way. I remember just, I don't know why this sticks out my head. Was one of the more recent ones. He hadn't called a game now since 2020, football, but either 19 or 20, we played at Mississippi State. But you can see the stadium, and he's going to tell us how to get there. There's a very strict way to get there, to get to your Nah, we don't need that. And we took his advice. We did. Drove around the stadium like two or three times, laughing at freeway. Now he was there's a fraternity among those play by play guys and Malcolm. You've been at the you've been in it about a quarter of a century. Hard to believe, but you've been at it a minute. And you know how those guys punch each other in the arm and talk and love to see each other, which is part of the reason they love doing what they do so much. But when he passed away, you had the opportunity to talk to a lot of these, lot of these guys, or some of their reflections on on their partner freeway.

Malcolm Butler 23:09

Well, you know, every time that these last four years, when I would do men's basketball or football, we'd go on the road. And you know, whether it was Randy Lee at Western Kentucky, or chip Walters at Middle Tennessee, or John teister at UTEP, just, you don't want Mr. Cox at Southern missed. You know, the first thing when they saw the first thing they always asked is, how's Dave doing? Right? Everybody wanted to know about Dave, percent right. You know, when, when he passed away. I had reached out to a few of them because, you know, I wanted to get their take on Dave for a story I was writing. And, you know, to a T, every one of them, they weren't used the word, you know, the pros, pro, right? You know he, you know, bled red and blue. I mean, he was just the consummate professional. And they all had this unbelievable respect for him. And you're right. I mean, you know, I watched Jack

Nixon at New Mexico State, right? I sat by him out in the basketball tournament this last year in Huntsville and New Mexico. He had already announced his retirement, and he had been doing New Mexico State for close to 50 years as well. And it was funny, our game was next, and, you know, as he signed off there, I knew it was the very last time he was going to sign off for New Mexico State, I mean, and he's, he's there, Dave Nitz in Las Cruces, right? And I thought to myself, you know, how much respect I had for him, but how sad it was at the same time. I mean, this guy has been doing this for five decades, and I, as much as I felt bad for Jack, I felt bad for New Mexico state's fan base, and that's, you know, kind of how you feel for Louisiana Tech. I followed in Dave's footsteps, and I knew from day one I was not going to be Dave Nitz. And I remember telling people, if I try to be Dave, I'm going to fail from day one, because there'll never be another guy like him, but there's a true fraternity, and I don't know that you're going to see a lot of people make it 40 and 50 years in radio with schools like we. Have over the last, you know, few decades,

Teddy Allen 25:03

and in in another thing that made Dave fascinating, 36 years of professional baseball, and that's a lot of that, seasons of bus rides when he turned 70. I called him that day, whatever that was, July 10, 15 years ago or 1213, years ago. Hey, freeways call and tell you, happy birthday. Where are you? And he was on a bus crossing the Canadian border with the Sioux City team. That is exactly where he wanted to be on his 70th birthday. Also had an affinity for Wendy's when

Malcolm Butler 25:33

we would go on road trips. So the rest of us would want to go find a steak place or a nice place to eat. And Dave didn't want to hear anything. He wanted Wendy's. And if we could talk him into eating somewhere, they had to have a buffet, right? And it had to have what? Beets, pickled beets. He had to have beets. If it had beets, he would agree to go there. Otherwise, it had to be Wendy's here. His his palate was a little different than

Teddy Allen 25:59

ours. One of the reasons I love going to El Paso, if we stayed at the cherman Inn right next to it, I came back to him one day my job was immediately we get to the hotel go scout for our Denny's, our Wendy's, or a buffet. It was in the next parking lot. I said, you this is Nirvana, the promised land. It's like a slice of West Virginia. They got all the pickle beets you need, and they got Caesar salad. But what kind of dressing did he have to have? He said, I want to see yourself with ranch dressing. Because Caesar with ranch

Malcolm Butler 26:30

dressing. Caesar with ranch right? Because it

Teddy Allen 26:33

burned his mouth. "Caesar burns my mouth." And he'd always like do his hand up against his mouth like it was burning as it burns my mouth, I guess, explain. God love him.

Chris Kennedy 26:41

I think he said that he preferred hospital food, or that people have said he preferred hospital food.

Teddy Allen 26:47

That is so funny. I forgot about that because he loved bland food. And we people like think we were close today, we were to a degree. But, I mean, he he wanted to be in the box at home with Marlene and the dog, which he said they were able to stay married for 100 years because he was only home really for 18 months his whole life. But he loved bland if you could talk bland food, the interstate system, baseball, country music before 1978 other than that, it's gonna be difficult to have a conversation with, am I right?

Malcolm Butler 27:21

you're right, unless you want to talk about his grandkids. So you would talk all day, all about his grandkids. But yeah, he was, he was awfully proud of his family as well. And you know, he he was Louisiana Tech, and he was, he was the the family, and he was West Virginia.

Teddy Allen 27:38

Loved truck stops. Loved the San Francisco Giants, loved dogs, loved Dr Pepper. Once eight, I don't know, I think it was seven or eight meals. He counted in a row at a Wendy's at some basketball tournament. Went to Waikiki. Never left the hotel. There wasn't anything to do. He said in Hawaii, same thing when he went to a basketball tournament Puerto Vallarta, or one of those places, like one of the last tournaments he went to preseason, Hey, didn't have Dr Pepper, and he just raised Kane. But he was too, genuinely mad. He was upset. He was angry. They didn't know this whole and then, of course, it didn't leave the place, because there's nothing to do.

Malcolm Butler 28:22

I think one thing that we and I'll let you do it, Teddy or or Chris, whoever wants to talk just how he got his nickname, Freeway Dave.

Teddy Allen 28:30

do you cover that in the book? Chris

Chris Kennedy 28:31

Yes, so Coach barmore and Dave, they were in Los Angeles, and Dave wanted to see all of the sites. And Dave likes to travel. He likes to drive. He likes to do it all. Well, in Los Angeles, there's lots of freeways that you kind of get trapped on with all the traffic. And Dave would get off one, he'd try and go to another one, same thing. And Coach Barmore just called him Freeway Dave.

Teddy Allen 28:58

He rented a car with unlimited mileage and exceeded it. We hope it's brought a smile to your face. It did to ours. Again, freeway. Dave would have been 83 on July 10 of this year. Passed away. June 24 at age 82 for 50 years, the golden voice of the Bulldogs from West Virginia, from Milton, West Virginia, and he'll certainly be missed again. I don't know if anybody that loved being themselves quite as much as day loved being freeway Dave. So it was a joy to experience that and to see a guy as stubborn as he was and setting his ways and sort of narrow minded. He loved ball, and he did exactly what he was supposed to be doing. He was born to be a broadcaster. So we take a knee and tip our cap to a guy

who was one of the last of a really special and dying breed. So for Malcolm Butler and Chris Kennedy and producer Gavin Kelly, and for. Our good friend Dave Nitz, So long everybody.

Gavin Kelly 30:17

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