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## The voice of the Sweet 16: Frankfort native has been announcing tourney for 37 years

Randy Mills knows a good gig when he has one. Mills, of Frankfort, wrapped up his 37th year as a KHSAA Boys' Sweet Sixteen public address announcer Sunday afternoon. "I have a lot of respect for the Sweet Sixteen," Mills said. "Growing up I remember going to the state tournament. I went to my first [...]"

By Linda Younkin  
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Randy Mills, of Frankfort, works as the public address announcer during Saturday's semifinals of the Whitaker Bank/KHSAA Boys' Sweet Sixteen at Rupp Arena. This year was the 37th year Mill has been a PA announcer at the tournament. (Photo courtesy of Bill Straus)

Bill Straus



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Mills, of Frankfort, wrapped up his 37th year as a KHSAA Boys' Sweet Sixteen public address announcer Sunday afternoon.

"I have a lot of respect for the Sweet Sixteen," Mills said. "Growing up I remember going to the state tournament. I went to my first state tournament when I was 8 years old, and I haven't missed a tournament.

"I just enjoy being around the game, and this allows me to stay in the game."

Mills, 58, is a college counselor at Sayre School in Lexington. He grew up around sports, serving as a team captain for baseball and basketball at Frankfort High.

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His father, Tom Mills, was the commissioner of the KHSAA, and he helped Randy get his start with the state tournament.

In 1978 when Randy was a sophomore at Eastern Kentucky University and his father learned that an announcer hadn't been assigned to the girls' state tournament at ECU, Tom Mills asked his son if he would be interested in the job.

That began a 20-year run announcing the girls' state tournament. In 1980 Randy Mills worked his first boys' state tournament, and he's been doing it ever since.

Mills' mentor in his early years as an announcer was John Tong, who worked the boys' state tournament and was the long-time announcer at Freedom Hall for University of Louisville games.



“He took me under his wing and taught me his system,” Mills said. “We worked a lot of games together. He was the consummate professional for sure.

“At Frankfort High a lot of times when we’d be at practice, we’d try to imitate John Tong’s voice.”

After calling so many games at the Sweet Sixteen, several stand out for Mills.

“There was 1982 with Paul Andrews and his shot heard around the state,” Mills said. “There was 1987 and 1988 with Allan Houston at Ballard and Richie Farmer at Clay County.

“The 1987 Sweet Sixteen at Rupp Arena when Clay County beat Ballard ... both teams played so well, the atmosphere, the sellout crowds.”

Video of Andrews’ half-court shot, which gave Laurel County a last-second win in the final, was shown on ESPN.

“I was calling the game,” Mills said, “and that call was heard on ESPN across the country.”

For Mills, his most unusual championship game was in 1992, when Lexington Catholic and University Heights met in the final at the same time Kentucky’s Unforgettables were playing Duke in what is considered one of the greatest college games of all time.

“I think my weirdest PA experience was the game in 1992,” Mills said. “Someone would be dribbling the ball up the court, and there’d be a loud cheer because everyone was keeping up with the Kentucky game.

“People were cheering about that game when there really wasn’t anything to cheer about on the court. It was in the second half when they told me I should announce that Kentucky was leading 103-102.

“I did, and someone came back a little later and said ‘I guess you better tell them Duke won 104-103.’”

In 1982 Mills became more involved with basketball as he, his brother David and Louis Stout started the AAU program.



“We started with a 15-and-under boys tournament, and one of the boys from that tournament was a 14-year-old Rex Chapman,” Mills said. “I got to know a lot of kids throughout the state and their coaches.

“I always enjoyed seeing them make it to the Sweet Sixteen.”

Mills stepped away from AAU in 2005 and a schedule that kept him on the move.

“I wonder about it now,” he said. “I’d do the girls’ state tournament one week, the boys’ Sweet Sixteen the next week, and then it was AAU season and almost every weekend we’d have a tournament. It was wall-to-wall basketball.”

Another sports interest for Mills is the Sports History Foundation, started by his brother David.

“We’re trying to document the great sports stories in Kentucky,” Randy Mills said, “particularly at the high school level.”

Completed film projects include the 1982 Madison Central baseball team, which went undefeated, and the Nicholas County girls basketball team winning the 1992 state championship.

It’s another way to stay involved in sports, just like the Sweet Sixteen is.

“It’s just about appreciating the game,” Mills said. “You learn about discipline, working with teammates by being involved in sports.

“This is a nice way to stay in the game.”



