

Making all the right calls

Former Concordia announcer rises from CIS all the way to NBA

ADAM STEISS
The Concordian (Concordia University)

MONTREAL (CUP)—He started his career calling games for Concordia's sports teams. Now former Concordia University Stingers game announcer Olivier Sedra mans the mic for the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers, with a post at the 2008 Beijing Olympics on the horizon.

Sedra's road to the Cavs' announcer booth began in the comparatively minuscule confines of the Concordia basketball gym. Enrolled in the radio/TV program at Concordia, Sedra later joined CJAD News as an intern.

"Radio and TV is more of a passion for me than anything else," he said. "I got my break with CJAD reporting on sports, covering the Habs post-game—that kind of thing."

Before joining the Cavs, Sedra cut his teeth with the American Basketball Association's Montreal Royal. Sedra had also garnered experience announcing at Stingers hockey games and wrestling matches, as well as at a few boxing matches. The Saint-Laurent native first heard of the Cleveland job opening through a news article and sent them some demos of his work. He was then shortlisted for an interview and audition.

"I thought it was kind of odd that they would bring me down since I'm Canadian, but I went down anyway with the assumption that even if I didn't get the job, I'd learn from the experience," he said.

Sedra's audition consisted of calling a pickup game between employees of the Cavaliers' Quicken Loans Arena. Aside from announcing the scorers, he also read public address announcements, game introductions, and ran sound checks for certain key game phrases. Everything Sedra said was recorded and later compared against the tapes of other applicants.

"I was called back down there two weeks later for the final auditions, then came back to Canada,

and another couple of weeks later, I was calling my first NBA game," he said.

In his first year as a big league announcer, Sedra had the fortune of calling the Cavs all the way to the NBA finals. His first real trial by fire occurred that same year during game six of the Eastern Conference finals. After the first quarter ended, the arena's scoreboard, game clock, and 24-second shot clock stopped working. This left Sedra as the only medium through which the players, coaches, and fans could keep track of the clocks.

"Everything just fell on my hands," he said. "There was a 21-minute delay, and the producer came up and told me that I would have to announce everything that went on in the game."

Among other responsibilities, he was counting down each possession so that the players knew how much time they had left to shoot.

"It brought me back to my roots," he said. "Growing up calling youth basketball, you call the time, you call the score, and everything in between. You never picture yourself doing it on national TV, but we had to adapt ourselves, and it became a production within a production."

Nonetheless, Sedra didn't miss a call.

With a full NBA season under his belt, Sedra has now been given the opportunity to make his calls on the international stage.

"After the finals, I met with my senior marketing director and my game director," he said. "They both told me that the NBA was recommending me to [the International Basketball Federation] to announce the Olympics, which is just such an honour."

Looking back on his start at Concordia and how he has turned his passion into a successful career, Sedra sees himself remaining an announcer for a long time yet.

"It's absolutely phenomenal, second to none. I have the best seat in the house, doing something that I love doing."

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