

# Boldness helps St Louis teen get start in radio

■ Hard work and a well-to-do family also have been ingredients in MICDS student Graham Bensinger's success with his own show.

BY DAN CAESAR

Of the Post-Dispatch

A lot of high school kids have part-time jobs and occasionally miss class to work. But not many, 18-year-olds already have their own radio show, have interviewed a wide range of athletes from Pete Rose to O.J. Simpson and have been guests on ABC, ESPN2, Court TV and MSNBC.

But that's what Graham Bensinger, a senior at Mary Institute-Country Day School, has done. Bensinger, whose sports show airs at noon Saturdays on KSLG (1380 AM), has interviewed more big-name athletes in the last two years than many adult broadcasters talk to in a decade.

"I think my age is a key," he said. "I think it's somewhat of a novelty for these guys to come on with me. When I go up to a player, a lot of time he has fun with it." But not all

"Many are surprised and very receptive. But some tell me to take a hike," Bensinger said.

He's energetic and can be as bold as Charles Barkley.

"I think I get better quality guests than anyone in St. Louis," he said. "Without a doubt"

His energy goes beyond an impressive guest list, it carries over to publicizing himself. He has his own Web site (www.thegbshow.com) and even has assembled a press kit that he hands out to anyone who might want to do a story about him. The folder contains a gaggle of stories that have been written about him, along with photos of himself with celebrities he has interviewed.

He likes to publicize himself.

"A lot of people wait for things to happen," Bensinger said, "They think that if they work hard, things will come their way. But I like to make them happen. I don't like to wait"

Bensinger has had a whirlwind entrance into broadcasting. He became interested when he was in eighth grade and soon thereafter formed a Web site at which he began broadcasting his own radio program on the Internet

"I sent out about 50 letters to agents and others, trying to get interviews with people like Tim McCarver, Will Clark and Bob Feller," he said.

One of his first interviews was with Clark, the former Cardinals first baseman who previously had a notable career with San Francisco.

"He called my house and my dad said, Will Clark's on the phone.' I don't think my parents thought I was serious about this until then," he said. "But that's when they realized this was more than a passing thing for me."

His father, Scott Bensinger, knew something was going on. "I'm not a sports fan. I don't watch sports and don't read the sports pages," he said. "But I realized something was going on when that call came."

Graham has come a long way since starting that small Internet program that was geared toward other kids. Last year, he decided to go mainstream by moving to a commercial station. Not many professional operations hire high school kids for significant on-air work, so he decided to go another route—he began buying his own time on KSLG. And he still pays his own way.



Bensinger  
18-year-old  
sportscaster

"I enjoy going out and getting sponsors," he said. "It's hard, but it is a very good education. But at some point I want to get paid directly, like most sportscasters do."

## Sour grapes?

Bensinger has an advantage that many aspiring journalists his age don't—he's well-heeled.

He lives in Ladue, goes to an exclusive private high school and is the son of a financial adviser whose father was the head of dentistry at Washington University. He has traveled to the Super Bowl, Lake Tahoe, Connecticut, Colorado and California among other places in pursuit of interviews. Several much older professionals in the business, when asked about him, have said things such as "oh, the rich kid whose parents fly him all over the country." Or "must be nice to have things handed to you."

His father is philosophical about that.

"We try to support him when we can," he said. "You try to present your kids with opportunities and hope they do something with them. They may do nothing. Or they leverage those opportunities. That's what he's done—he has leveraged his opportunities."

That's no different than what happens in many other businesses, and even sportscasting where people have parlayed opportunities provided by their families into successful careers. And young Bensinger said he finances his trips through money earned from the shows.

But while he might have advantages over others, he hustles. To wit, he was on a family vacation in Vail, Colo., in the summer of 2003 when the news broke of Kobe Bryant's troubles in nearby Eagle. "I couldn't believe the amount of media attention it was getting," Bensinger said. "As a reporter and broadcaster, you feel obligated to go. So I drove to

## Guest list

Some of the big-name guests whom 18-year-old sportscaster Graham Bensinger has interviewed:

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|-----------------|------------------|
| Troy Aikman     | Dennis Eckersley |
| Muhammad Ali    | Julius Eving     |
| Ernie Banks     | Marshall Faulk   |
| Charles Barkley | John Madden      |
| George Brett    | Stan Musial      |
| Joe Buck        | Pete Rose        |
| Bob Costas      | O.J. Simpson     |
| Dan Dierdorf    | Ozzie Smith      |
| Mike Ditka      |                  |

Eagle, it was only about a half-hour away, and spent the day there."

He said his mission wasn't to break news but to make contacts—something he's done at the Super Bowl and ESPY Awards ceremonies.

"When I'm at one of these events, I just go out and introduce myself to everyone," he said. "My whole goal at going to Eagle was to get (telephone) numbers for reporters who were covering it so I could have them on my radio show. But it led to a lot more. It turned out to be a great decision."

That's because some of the producers from major national shows took an interest in him and decided to use him as a guest. Maybe it was the novelty of someone so young. Maybe it was the impression he made. But whatever it was, he soon was appearing on Court TV, ABC's "Good Morning America" and ESPN2's "Cold Pizza." Last summer he had a two-week stint working on radio broadcasts of the minor-league baseball team in Spokane, Wash., and said he'll do that again next season.

Then there was the Simpson interview, one of the few Simpson did while in St. Louis last winter. Although he didn't get Simpson to admit anything controversial, or even say he still was looking

for the "real killer" of his ex-wife, it still was a coup.

"At the beginning of my sophomore year; I had met his agent, and I worked on it for a year and a half," Bensinger said. "It finally came together. It was an honor, regardless of what you think of O.J. Simpson."

## The future

College is next for Bensinger, who is far from polished as his voice still has a nasal tone and his delivery isn't refined. Although a decision still looms as to which school to attend, he has applied to seven schools—with Missouri, Syracuse, Southern California and Northwestern being his favorites.

"I want to do television play-by-play," he said. "Eventually, I'd like to have my own radio show. I know they're pretty hefty goals, but I think I can get there. I'm also interested in the business side, maybe someday owning a television station or a radio station."

He had sought advice from Joe Buck and Bob Costas; two St Louisans who have had a bit of success in the business. And he's heeded any work-ethic advice he's been given.

"I work five or six hours a day on my radio show and don't get to bed till 2 many nights," he said. "So on the weekends I'm so exhausted."

That isn't exactly the schedule most high school kids keep, and his jet-setting keeps him out of the classroom a lot.

"I miss quite a bit of school, probably a month or so (over the course of a year)," he said. "My grades could be better. But as long as I get good grades, my parents said I can continue doing this. But if I don't, it's all over."

That doesn't seem imminent "The whole thing is amazing," his father said. "He's focused and driven and works hard."

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