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On This Show, Vinny From Lincoln High Is Host

By JOE BRESCIA



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Vinny Aceto at WNYE-FM. He says sports help keep students from dropping out of high school.

At precisely 1 p.m. on Friday, an unlikely radio program blares to life on the lower end of the FM dial. The program is all sports, all the time: interviews with players and coaches, discussions about big games and steroids — the kind of fare that is a staple of sports radio everywhere.

But this program, on WNYE-FM (91.5), has nothing to do with professional or college athletics. Instead, for 60 minutes, “On the Sidelines,” as the program is called, focuses on high school sports in New York City, making it, according to its host, the only such radio show in the city.

Because high school sports receives far less attention in the city than in many other parts of the country, “On the Sidelines” provides an unusual and valuable service, according to Vinny Aceto, its host for 19 years.

“Ever since my father took me to watch my first high school football game, I was hooked,” said Mr. Aceto, 47, who grew up in Gravesend, Brooklyn. “To be honest, watching young student athletes play for school pride is a whole lot better on some occasions than watching some million-dollar prima donnas.”

When he was a teenager, Mr. Aceto had dreams of becoming a top athlete at Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn. But he quickly learned that he could not run fast enough, jump high enough or throw hard enough. He decided that when it comes to pursuing a passion, those who cannot play do other things. So he became the statistician for the Lincoln teams. He went on to St. John’s University, where he majored in athletic administration.

Even as Mr. Aceto achieved success in professional sports settings, first for American League baseball, then at Madison Square Garden as the statistician for the Rangers hockey team, his love for high school sports never subsided. He still compiled statistics for Lincoln High and went to as many high school games as he could.

Then, in 1989, Alex Best, the host of the high school sports program on WNYE-FM, asked Mr. Aceto to join him on the broadcast.

“I saw Vinny roaming up and down the sidelines at our mutual alma mater, Abraham Lincoln,” said Mr. Best, who left the program in 1996. “He was doing his thing, counting the yardages on punts, kickoff returns, keeping separate stats for each team. I must have said to myself, ‘Who does this much work for a high school game?’ Well, I learned Vinny does.”

To keep up with all things high school, Mr. Aceto, who still lives in Gravesend, scans schedules and Web sites, calls coaches and sees many contests: baseball, football, soccer, wrestling. Any time, any borough.

Public schools, some Catholic and private schools, too. Mr. Aceto is single, but married, he said, “to high school sports.”

On a recent Friday, he sat in a tiny radio studio on Tillary Street in Downtown Brooklyn. “You can barely fit four people in the room,” he said.

Besides being the host, Mr. Aceto books guests, produces the program and does his own research. He is also the engineer for other shows at the station, which is owned by the city.

His program starts with a very loud song from the 2003 Jack Black film “School of Rock,” followed by a recorded imitation of the Yankee Stadium announcer Bob Sheppard, performed by Ernie Guarneri, Mr. Aceto’s history teacher from Lincoln High School.

Then, Mr. Aceto, in an energized, caffeinated delivery, talks about the latest news, star players and teams, and conducts interviews, both recorded and in the studio. These days, he is high on Lance Stephenson, the junior point guard on Lincoln’s basketball team (Mr. Aceto calls him “a human highlight film”).

Professional players who have been on the program as high school stars include Stephon Marbury of the Knicks and Sebastian Telfair of the Minnesota Timberwolves, both from Lincoln; Lance Schulters, a safety for the Miami Dolphins who went to Canarsie High in Brooklyn; and Jason Marquis, the Chicago Cubs pitcher who attended Tottenville on Staten Island.

A frequent guest is Ed Grezinsky, the coach of the Murry Bergtraum High School girls’ basketball team in Manhattan, which won its 10th consecutive city championship last Sunday.

“He loves high school sports. and he wants to promote it,” Mr. Grezinsky said of Mr. Aceto. “He wants the schools, the players and the coaches to get the respect and recognition they deserve. And he puts his heart and soul into it.”

Other New York personalities have stopped by to sing the praises of high school sports. The television talk show host Larry King, for instance, discussed being a student at Lafayette High School in Brooklyn and about the sports stars the school produced, like pitcher Sandy Koufax.

When Mr. Aceto told Mr. King that he went to Lincoln, a rival, Mr. King was not pleased. “What?” Mr. King exclaimed. “I never would have done the interview if I knew you went to Lincoln!”

With budget cuts affecting high school sports throughout the city, the elimination of some programs, low attendance and less exposure in the news media, Mr. Aceto said his high-octane passion is needed more than ever.

“People tell me this is a town only interested in pro teams,” he said. “But I tell them that high school sports is the No. 1 dropout prevention program in the city. I’m going to keep talking about the players and the games and keep up the excitement and passion until they pick me up and physically remove me from the studio.”