

Detroit Free Press

November 24, 1996

THEY WILL, THEY WILL, ROCK YOU MUSIC AT SPORTING EVENTS HAS BECOME A KEY PART OF THE FUN FORMULA

BRIAN MCCOLLUM Free Press Pop Music Writer; , GENI DEMONDE contributed

Tim Campbell is a puppeteer. He pushes a button, and 15,000 figures rise in unison. He turns a knob, and 30,000 hands clap. He flips a switch, and 7,000 butts wiggle.

That's skill. Finesse. Power.

Yeah, OK, Campbell doesn't work with puppets. He works with real, live sports fans, and his knobs and switches play music. He's a DJ, the guy at Detroit Red Wings games who pumps out tunes, inciting the Joe Louis Arena crowd to stand, clap, wiggle -- and sometimes groan. His music guides the crowd's moods as often as it's guided by them. Even players such as Darren McCarty, a devout hard rock fan, look to Campbell and his loud music for inspiration.

"After a while you get numb to the fact that you have so much control," says Campbell from his upstairs booth, his eyes rarely straying from the ice below, fingers poised for action. "You're basically just doing your job." But it's a big job in today's sports kingdom, a world where getting Michael Jordan's face onto a movie poster is as important as getting a basketball into his hands.

Across the country, playlists vary from arena to arena, but it's possible to nail down basic musical personalities: The NBA goes for the upbeat, the NHL rides a cutting edge, and the NFL sticks with the tried-and-true.

A sampling from recent local games shows that those trends stick in Detroit:

* Red Wings: "Let's Get Ready for This" (2 Unlimited), "Wax Ecstatic" (Sponge), "Scooby Snacks" (Fun Loving Criminals), "Brain Stew" (Green Day).

* Pistons: "Y.M.C.A." (Village People), "Mony Mony" (Billy Idol), "Heartache

Tonight" (the Eagles), "Papa Got a Brand New Bag" (James Brown).

* Lions: "Danger Zone" (Kenny Loggins), "The Final Countdown" (Europe), "I Can't Help Myself" (the Four Tops), "Any Man of Mine" (Shania Twain).

Following the NBA's lead, the NHL this summer held its first game-production meeting. The Red Wings, who had impressed the league with their spring playoff package of video and music, were among three teams asked to make a presentation.

Marketing director Ted Speers says that Campbell and the rest of the Wings' 10-member production crew have uncovered the basic secret of sports music.

"There's a lot of hitting in hockey, so you want stuff that's upbeat and pulsing," says Speers.

"We try to build on the crowd's excitement or, if it's not there, to build it."

Wise-guy connections

The Joe Louis crowd on this recent weekday night is pretty excited, with the Red Wings romping over the hated Hartford Whalers.

Campbell's in a groove in his cramped cubbyhole over section 203, where he works with four mini-disc players and a collection of nearly 500 songs and sound snippets.

No matter how a game's going, he stays alert at all times: 60 minutes of hockey action, 30 minutes of between-period breaks and innumerable stops for injuries, penalties and timeouts. He doesn't skip downstairs to indulge in a Joe Louis hot dog or restroom. He doesn't yell -- well, not real loud -- during big plays in big games.

His job demands the precision of Wings star Sergei Federov and the musical savvy of Casey Kasem. His hands move fast, sometimes

snatching and cueing up discs within seconds to make wise-guy musical connections to the Wings' ice action: En Vogue's "Never Gonna Get It" after strong defensive plays, War's "Why Can't We Be Friends" during fights, Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" when the team is losing.

This night's first-period flurry -- three goals in four minutes -- has Campbell scurrying: Out bounced 2 Unlimited's "Let's Get Ready for This" after the Red Wings' goals, and a snarky "One" by Three Dog Night following a Hartford score. A promotion featuring a fireman on a Zamboni got him scrambling for apt accompaniment. He passed on "Smoke on the Water" and "Fire and Ice" to play the Talking Heads' "Burning Down the House." His headset is continually jammed with voices from crew members across the arena and the main control room downstairs, where images for the big video screen are booted up and Campbell's songs are mixed for volume and tone. Occasionally they give him song suggestions, but mostly the split-second decisions are his own.

"We take a great deal of pride in what we play," says the Wings' Speers. "What we play today can be old tomorrow. We want to keep it fresh and exciting."

That's why Campbell flinches when a third-period call comes from boss Speers to spin the "Macarena," which the Red Wings were playing a year ago, long before it reached hit-and-burnout status. They debate the move -- the Wings' blue-collar fans will boo, Campbell warns -- but ultimately go for it. A few fans get out of their seats to dance. A bunch of fans boo.

HOW THEY RATE:

Wings

Pistons

Lions

Overall:	B+	B-	C-
Musical Quality:	A	A-	D
Hip Quotient:	A-	B-	F
Variety:	B	B-	B
Cleverness Of Use:	B+	B+	C
Crowd Involvement:	B	B	C
Local Ties:	C	C	B
'Macarena' Abstinence:	B+	D	D

Copyright © 1996, Detroit Free Press