



The Miley Collection

When John Miley's parents gave him a wire recorder in 1947, they had no idea—nor did he—that they were introducing him to a hobby that one day would land him and his collection of more than 6,000 historic sports radio and television broadcast recordings in the Library of Congress.

At first he recorded sports events merely for his personal pleasure, with no thought to saving the tapes. In college—first at West Point, then at the University of Oklahoma—the petroleum engineering major from Evansville, Indiana, had little time for taping. However, he managed to attend in person a couple of OU's most legendary games—the 1953 OU-Notre Dame clash that was the Sooners' last loss before Bud Wilkinson's famed 47-win streak and the Texas game of that year that started the historic run.

Miley recalls his OU days as "a grand time," living first in the Delta Upsilon fraternity house, playing intramurals, making lasting friendships. The next year, he married Carol Wesselman, his hometown sweetheart, who joined him at OU and finished a degree in speech therapy. Together they began the nomadic life of the oil patch, being sent by Gulf Oil to Lyons, Kansas, ironically back to Evansville, then to Monahans, Texas, and in 1960, to nearby Odessa.

By 1962, he had acquired a reel-to-reel recorder and began saving some of the audio he was taping of televised sports events—but just highlights, the parts he thought he might want to hear again in future years. Increasingly interested in preservation, he sought the best reel-to-reel tape available, a Scotch brand guaranteed to last "forever"—and so far it has, with not a single incident of disintegration.

Volunteering at the local radio station in Odessa allowed Miley to venture into the broadcasting side of his passion for sports, calling play-by-play of basketball and football for Permian High School, now famed as the inspiration for the book, movie and TV series, "Friday

Night Lights." His wife, Carol, taped all those broadcasts and also his nightly program of sports commentary and game highlights. That highly enjoyable Texas interlude ended when his father died in Evansville, and Miley received a job offer to come back home.

Over the years, newspaper stories about Miley and his collection made him an Evansville celebrity and led to expansion into all kinds of sports nationwide. A local article called him to the attention of *Sporting News*, where a full-page story included an invitation to anyone interested in joining "John Miley's tape network." He was deluged with volunteers.

The basement of his home became a highly organized audio resource for national sports commentators looking for highlights to accompany film clips. He would not accept money for his participation but did acquire a number of tapes from the grateful professionals. One who came through in a big way was the late Curt Gowdy, a legendary sports announcer who had broadcast OU football and basketball games for the Oklahoma City CBS radio affiliate in the 1940s. Through Gowdy, Miley obtained many Sooner sports broadcasts—including the 1953 OU-Notre Dame game.

One of Miley's contacts urged him to seek a license from Major League Baseball that would enable him to share his baseball recordings through a business he started online in 1990. He found that baseball highlights were much more in demand than basketball, football or hockey—but he had some of everything: more than 50 Kentucky Derbies, for instance, many, many Indianapolis 500s, all kinds of golf and tennis, every World Series



Daniel R. Palmore/The New York Times/Redux

John Miley's collection of historic radio and television sports broadcasts had long outgrown the basement of his Evansville, Indiana, home when he arranged for the tapes to be acquired by the Library of Congress.

game since 1957, every Super Bowl—the list goes on and on.

By the time *The New York Times* discovered John Miley, he was retired and had begun thinking about finding a permanent place for his burgeoning collection. The *Times* article triggered several inquiries from entities interested in acquiring the tapes—the most intriguing from the Library of Congress for its sound collection, which was woefully weak in the area of sports. The Library announced the acquisition in March 2011 and hired Miley as a consultant charged with finding other such audio and video collections, work he conducts from his Evansville home office with occasional trips to Washington, D.C.

Miley has been asked by other sports aficionados with a recording bent how to get started. He advises them to make certain that the enthusiasm is not the primary focus of their lives and to narrow their collecting to a single sport, even better a single team. With as many as 17 tapes coming to his home in a day during football season, he never had time to play many of the broadcasts he collected.

Now safely ensconced in the Library of Congress, however, those historic highlights are available to generations of enthusiasts who have plenty of time to listen.

— CJB