



# MEDIA INFORMATION

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## VERSATILE FOX SPORTS BROADCASTER VARSHA SHARES UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON CAREER BEHIND THE MIC

*This extended Q&A marks the first in a series with FOX Sports motor sports personalities to be highlighted over the next several months. To learn more about Bob Varsha, FS1's voice of the FIM MotoGP™ World Championship, FIA Formula E Championship, TUDOR United SportsCar Championship and FIA World Endurance Championship, please visit <http://foxs.pt/1KsodsK> and follow him on Twitter @BobVarsha.*

**FOX SPORTS:** This year for FS1, you've covered sports cars, motorcycles and the brand new fully electric vehicles of Formula E. With that kind of diversity, is there a process you go through to keep it all organized as you prepare for each broadcast?

**VARSHA:** I used to keep paper files on each series going back to the late 1990s, when I even had more on my plate than I do now, between CART, F1, drag racing, sports cars, motorcycles and so on. Those days are gone thanks to computers and the internet, but the process of staying current never changes. I'm on the computer every day following events. To me, the most important broadcast is the next one, so my focus shifts from one series to another depending on what I have coming up. There are lots of great sources out there, and I make it a practice to follow multiple web sites, official and otherwise, for each series to compare information and avoid discrepancies.

When I find myself reading about things I was already aware of from another source, then I feel comfortable that I've got the picture. Twitter is good for some insight as well, and of course there's always the phone, though I prefer to speak with people face to face, which is getting tougher as the sports broadcast industry shifts to a studio-based method of covering events, especially overseas races. When I have my information, I can then tailor my preparations based on the announcers I'm working with so as to mesh better with their personalities and the things they like to talk about on-air. On certain series, such as MotoGP or Formula E, I'm sitting alone in a studio far removed from the track, which calls for a very different approach: very brief comments, putting an emphasis on making a relevant point in a very short span of time before giving way to the announcers at the track.

**FOX SPORTS:** As the "quarterback" of the broadcast teams you share the booth with, what do you consider your main responsibility and how do you go about achieving it?

**VARSHA:** Like any team sport, I think the commentary booth works best when each announcer understands their role in the broadcast. When people ask me how I managed to work so many different racing series, or even different sports entirely, I tell them that what I do as host really doesn't change from broadcast to broadcast, no matter what the particular sport may be. My job is to welcome our viewers and tell them what they need to know going in: where we are, who the players are, what's at stake, key storylines and so on. Aside from that, I try to help frame the conversation, as I like to think of it. Because that's my idea of a good broadcast: a bunch of friends sitting around talking about what's happening in front of us. I may use what I've learned over the years as the basis for a question for my colleagues or to explain some technical jargon, but I never raced with anything but my feet, and I certainly never raced cars or bikes, so that's not what I'm there to talk about. That job belongs to the experts who are there in the booth with me, telling the viewer whether whatever just happened was good or bad, why it happened, and what it means in the big picture. And the system definitely works best when the personalities in the booth like each other as people, because that inspires us to help each other make the show better.

**FOX SPORTS:** You've shared the booth with some talented and interesting cohorts over the years. Is there an at-track or post-event dinner/drinks memory that sticks out?

**VARSHA:** Wow. The stories from 30-plus years of doing this could fill the proverbial book, and maybe they will someday. Among them would be the time I hosted a made-for-TV special called "The One Day Decathlon" at Washington State University with Olympic gold medalist Daley Thompson as my color analyst. As one of the competitors prepared for a pole vault attempt Daley said on-air "If he makes this height I'll eat that blazer you're wearing." Of course the vaulter cleared the bar, and I turned to ask Daley how he'd like my blazer prepared? While covering the World Alpine Ski Championships in Vail I found myself dozing in a hallway during a break next to a certain no-nonsense female American downhiller who was working with us, when I opened my eyes to find that she had decided this was a good time to change her pants. When she finished, she plopped down next to me and said "You weren't supposed to see that."

The most memorable moments come from the 25 years I spent traveling the globe with David Hobbs. Among these was the rainy night at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in 1990 that I crashed a Porsche 944 Turbo on loan from the factory, leaving David with a sizeable lump on his head delivered by the passenger-side window. But probably my favorite was an all-night party a year or two later following the Le Mans 24 Hours, at a quaint French *auberge* where David held a packed room enthralled with a wine-fueled rendition of his trademark "Twenty Quid" joke about a crafty old man and a honeymooning young couple, including a well-endowed bride, on a train.

**FOX SPORTS:** Which current/former racers have impressed you over the years when they've stepped into the role of TV analyst? How/Why?

**VARSHA:** I'm always impressed when an ex-athlete makes a smooth transition from competing to commentary, because the old adage is true: it's harder than it looks. Analysis seems to be everywhere on television these days, and there are plenty of examples of lesser talents from among what Howard Cosell used to call "the jockocracy." Having said that, I've been lucky to work with some terrific ex-drivers, beginning with Hobbs, who bring the perfect combination of experience, honesty and irreverence. Back in the F1 days on another network I worked with Eddie Cheever on a few occasions, and I always thought Eddie had a lot of David's qualities and really made the viewer understand what it's like in the race car. Tommy Kendall and Calvin

Fish, two of my current FOX Sports booth mates, stand out. They both remind me over and over that veteran racers see things on track that the rest of us miss. I should also mention Steve Matchett, who in my view pioneered the role of the “mechanic in the booth” we see so often now in motor sports television. Steve was the original, in much the same way Chris Economaki pioneered the role of the pit reporter.

**FOX SPORTS:** You have a distinctive style and voice as a broadcaster ... did you watch/learn from others as you were coming into the business? Anyone stand out as someone you emulated or simply learned from?

**VARSHA:** I hear that often, and I wish I could explain my individual style. I suppose it stems at least in part from the fact that I was never trained as a broadcaster at all. My background was in the law, which I think in many ways parallels broadcasting, since story-telling and legal advocacy are basically the same in that you have to have your facts straight, you must be convincing, and you have to have a feel for your listener. And of course vocabulary is an important skill for both.

On the television side, I've learned from so many talented people, beginning at Turner Broadcasting, where I was part of an amazing sports department at CNN, working under Bill McPhail and among the likes of Nick Charles, Dan Patrick, Keith Olbermann and Fred Hickman. When I began my motorsports involvement I learned so much from NASCAR Hall of Famer Ken Squier and my talented friend Dave Despain. But if I had to pick one broadcaster I admired most, it would have to be Jim McKay, the personification of the broadcast host for generations at “Wide World of Sports” in an amazing era for sports broadcasting. As a former newspaperman he had tremendous word skills, and he, like Ken Squier, taught me that we cannot really appreciate sports without knowing something about the athletes as people, so that we come to care in some way about what happens to them or what they accomplish on the day. I actually waited on McKay when he and golfer Dave Marr shared a table at the restaurant I was working for in my home town of Atlanta during a tournament!

**FOX SPORTS:** Is there a motor sport you haven't called that you'd like to? Any other sport that interests you?

**VARSHA:** I can't think of a form of motorsport I would like to cover, because there really aren't any that I haven't already. In the decade I spent at ESPN I was lucky to be asked to cover a wide range of sports, including gymnastics, skiing, skating, track and field, even things like archery, shooting, equestrian (when it comes to three-day eventing, I'm your man) and, of course, all sorts of motor sports. I developed something of a reputation as the guy you could count on seeing on the network when there was some big event, such as a World Series or a Super Bowl, dominating things on one of the big networks. I loved it! Learning a new sport and the personalities involved remains a very satisfying challenge. More recently, I covered the 2001 Tour de France, which fascinated me. I would love to do “Le Tour” again someday, or any road cycling event, which is simply a beautiful sport to watch as well as being the toughest physical challenge there is.

In terms of sports I've not done but would like to, I'd pick baseball, golf and tennis. Baseball because it moves at a pace that allows the announcers tremendous latitude for stories and information. The same for golf, which is so much of a mental game, and the tournaments are played on so many wonderful courses. And tennis offers such great personalities in a confined, dramatic space that the commentary has to be sharp and brief at the same time, which is a real challenge. I wouldn't turn down a chance to cover soccer, either.