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RAMBLING NO MORE

Gambling slides right back in at WOR

BY MAUREEN NEVIN DUFFY • CORRESPONDENT • MAY 11, 2008

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John R. Gambling, last of the legendary "Rambling with Gamblings," slid back behind the WOR Radio (710AM) mike Monday at a new time and with a new program: "The John Gambling Show" from 5:30 to 9 a.m. Gambling said he had "reinvented" himself during the months he spent off the air: "I had turned into a person with a point of view."

Gambling officially cut the umbilical cord on the Rambling moniker, which admirably served three generations of Gamblings, at an April 30 news conference at Ben Benson's Steak House on 52nd St., New York City, where he also announced his return to WOR. Adam Buckman of the New York Post and David Hinckley of the Daily News — not to overlook a radiant Marcia Kramer, CBS-TV's political reporter, tucked in a corner — all were hanging on Gambling's words, as were his wife, children and two nieces.

The station turned John R. Gambling loose in 2000 and soon after WABC Radio (770AM) picked him up. But on March 3, 2008, Citadel Broadcasting, which now owns WABC Radio, made a string of cuts at stations across the country (see next week's column for more on a troubling national trend) — including John Gambling and his news director George Weber, who has since accepted a reduced schedule for the WABC Radio Network. Joe Bartlett, who with Donna Hanover occupied the slot that is now Gambling's, stays on as Gambling's news announcer. Hanover will be the arts critic-at-large.

Gambling's new chapter has coincided with the rebranding of WOR as "News Talk Radio 710," according to Jerry Crowley, vice president and general manager of WOR. The new show will be headline-driven and will reprise the Friday-morning visits with Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who joined Gambling for the press conference.

"He's a chip off the old block. I've been carrying him for six years," quipped Bloomberg, who won't be in New York City for their first reunion, but plans to call in from Belfast. "All Jewish boys go to Belfast, didn't you know that?"

On a more serious note, the mayor, who refused to continue on WABC with Gambling's replacement, Curtis Sliwa, said Gambling's show is very different from those in which the host tries to dominate the conversation. (A conservative, Gambling said he would not side with any party but rather be a pragmatist in discussions.)

WOR's venerable host Joan Hamburg, at a table front and center, was "thrilled," she told us.

"There's nothing more exhilarating than a homecoming — even if I don't always agree with everything John says."

Greetings from Asbury

Hamburg did a remote show last summer from the boardwalk in Asbury Park. She told Radio Somewhere she always jumps at the chance to come down to the Shore because many of her relatives live here. Her cousin Nancy and Nancy's husband, Dr. Martin Seidenstein, live in Manasquan.

We sat with the chairman of WOR's parent, Buckley Radio, Rick Buckley, who talked about the pressing need for an outlet for people to talk about the news of the day. Buckley's daughter, Jen, who handles

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sales for WOR, sat across the table. Also at our table were COO Joe Bilotta and his son Greg Bilotta, the station's national sales manager, as well as Crowley. Family-wide commitment appears to be part of the WOR heritage.

Gambling told Radio Somewhere that listeners were a big part of his decision to return to radio.

"Most times you're sitting in the studio with maybe a guest, but probably just an engineer and you wonder sometimes, how am I doing? It's good to grade the importance of what you're doing. The reactions of people like your readers had a great influence on my decision to return to radio."

Gambling's talk news focus pits him directly against two stalwart Jersey morning shows: NJ 101.5's Jim Gearhart and Jack Ellery of WCTC (1430AM), a morning fixture at the station.

"John Gambling's return to WOR is of interest to WCTC because he's a legendary name returning to a heritage radio station," says the station's program director, Bruce Johnson. As far as market share of advertisers, Johnson noted that WCTC's rivals are WABC and WOR.

"So his movement from one station to the next is a bit of a wash for us. Our long-time morning man, Jack Ellery, who has been with us for most of the past 45 years, is once again matched up against a Gambling."

Gambling's first guest was Oliver North. His second-day topic was New Jersey's ex-governor's domestic court proceedings. Gambling sounded like a man more accustomed to maneuvering his way among the yachtmen of Palm Beach than the politicians of Woodbridge with three-way love trysts. But he held his own, fielding calls from people of measured opinions, with his customary grace.

See Gambling in person at the Get Healthy Expo, taking place from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 21 at the New Jersey Convention and Expo Center.

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