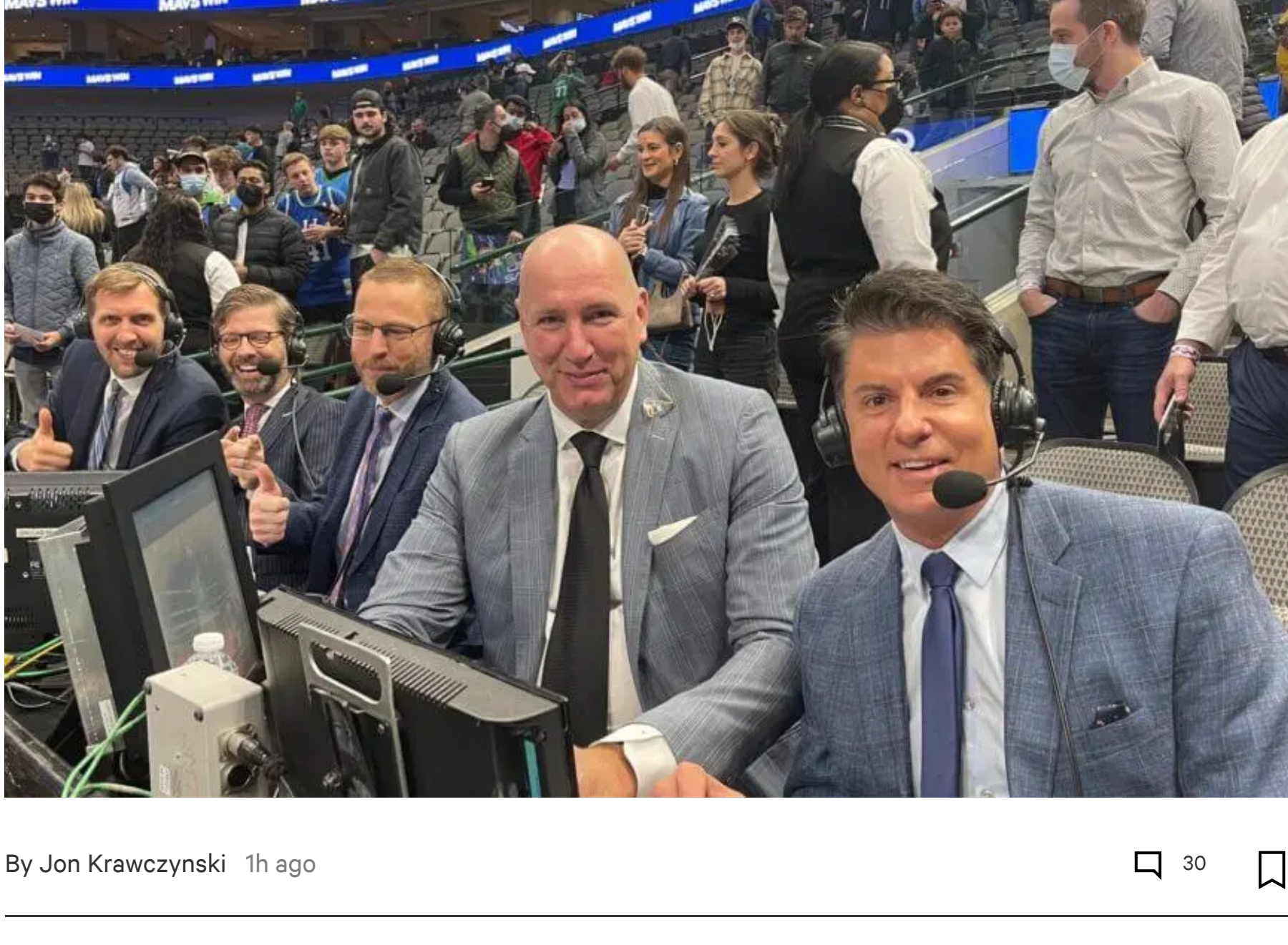


Dave Benz will not return as Timberwolves play-by-play announcer, calls it ‘a gut-wrenching day’



By Jon Krawczynski 1h ago

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The [Minnesota Timberwolves](#) will have a new play-by-play voice on television next season.

Bally's Sports North has decided not to pick up the option for television play-by-play announcer Dave Benz, ending a 10-year relationship in which Benz and color analyst Jim Petersen formed a television tandem that was widely respected among fans, media and league observers. The decision by Bally's, which came with the support of the Timberwolves, came as a stunner to Benz, who told *The Athletic* that he was "heartbroken" when informed of the news on Wednesday morning.

"It's very disheartening and very sad because I've grown to love my time with the team and the players and the coaches, the people in the front office, the people on the Bally's side," Benz said in a telephone conversation. "Everybody's been fantastic. Today has really been a gut-wrenching day for me to say the least. It definitely was not something I saw coming."

Benz came to the Timberwolves in 2012 to replace the revered Tom Hanneman. Over the next nine seasons, he won four Emmy awards as the top play-by-play voice in the Upper Midwest region and shared another with the entire BSN Timberwolves broadcast team for their coverage of the team.

Bally Sports North declined to comment.

"We would like to thank Dave Benz for his 10 years of service as the Minnesota Timberwolves play-by-play voice," the Timberwolves said in a statement while declining further comment. "We appreciate all the memories he has provided our players and fans from his calls throughout the years. We wish him the best of luck in the next chapter of his broadcasting career."

Benz was notified by BSN officials early Wednesday morning. He said he had started to wonder about his situation when the company delayed discussions about picking up his contract as the Timberwolves season came down the stretch. It was customary for Benz to receive notice that the was returning in the early spring. But when that word didn't come this season, he chalked it up to the hectic atmosphere created by a playoff run for the team and figured it would be addressed as soon as the season ended.

He said he was told, in conversations with BSN and the Timberwolves, that the decision was not related to his performance. He was told, Benz said, that both parties believed it was time for a fresh start.

"Am I disappointed? For sure. Am I shocked? A hundred percent," Benz said. "Do I have any ill will towards anybody? I'm not going to say that I'm happy, but I don't have negative thoughts for anybody. They're entitled to do what they want to do and I've had nothing but great experiences and great memories and great relationships with all the people that I've worked with. As hard as this day is, that's what I'm going to take with me, is what an amazing 10 years I've had."

With the team gaining a new audience from its first playoff run in four seasons and a rapidly changing media landscape that includes BSN exploring an individual streaming service for coverage of the Wolves, Twins, Wild and Minnesota United, coupled with the option in Benz's contract made the timing right for a change in their eyes. The decision was not disciplinary in nature, sources told *The Athletic*.

In addition to the Upper Midwest Emmys he has taken home, which includes the last two seasons for announcer of the year, Benz and Petersen are routinely mentioned by die-hard NBA League Pass watchers as among the best duos in the league. Petersen's X's and O's acumen blended nicely with Benz's wide-eyed exuberance, often gaining the pair mention from [ESPN's Zach Lowe](#) and the [Ringer's Ryen Russillo](#), two voracious, highly respected NBA analysts, among their favorite broadcast pairings.

As he reflected on his decade in Minnesota on Wednesday afternoon, Benz choked up several times while describing the chemistry and friendship he had with Petersen. It started when he came in for a tryout and the two called a previously recorded Wolves game off of a small television. Benz misidentified [Kevin Love](#) as Luke Ridnour, which got a hearty jab from Petersen, and the two were off and running on a partnership that would become known for their easy back-and-forth, conversational style.

"Jim is one of my best friends," Benz said. "That's the hardest thing for me is that I'm going to miss my best friend. I'm going to miss my brother. I'm going to miss everyone that I work with in the truck that is part of the traveling party. We've grown together over the years and shared so many memories on the road and dinners and a couple beers here and there."

Behind the scenes, Benz was one of the more visible and active television play-by-play men when it came to engaging coaches in pregame press conferences, chatting up players on the court before the game and picking the brains of those around the court for details he could pass along during the broadcast. For instance, one of his pet projects was to ask every coach in the league, one-on-one after his press conference had finished, what his philosophy was if the team was on defense with a three-point lead late in the game. Did the coach foul before a shot to put the opponent on the line for two free throws? Or did he play it straight up?

Benz gained chuckles for the wonder with which he relayed arcane stats and would regale those around the team with adventures of his travels abroad in the offseason. Hardly a broadcast would go by without him mentioning a call he made to Sportradar, the sports research firm, to ask them to dig up the stat for how often the Wolves won on a Tuesday coming off of one day of rest and making fewer free throws than their opponents.

"I definitely had a unique way of looking at things sometimes," Benz said with a chuckle. "Listen, at the end of the day, those guys had to love it because I was job security for them."

Benz spoke glowingly of the gracious reception he received from Hanneman, who was moved into a studio role before he arrived. And while he covered largely unsuccessful teams — the Timberwolves only made the playoffs twice in his 10 seasons — Benz still had a laundry list of fond memories, including Kevin Garnett's return in a trade in 2015, Rick Adelman's 1,000th career coaching victory in 2013, the Game 82 victory over Denver in 2018 that clinched a playoff spot, Karl-Anthony Towns' 60-point game this season and the overall emergence of [Anthony Edwards](#) as a young star.

"It's just been an amazing, amazing ride," Benz said. "I will forever be grateful for the opportunities I had."

One of Benz's signatures as play-by-play announcer was his recent introduction of Ant Facts. Whenever Edwards would throw down a big dunk or make a big play, Benz would bellow a deeply researched nugget designed to articulate the menacing side of the insect.

It all started when Benz was dissatisfied with his call of [a massive Edwards dunk](#) on Toronto's Yuta Watanabe. After the game, he resolved to come up with something creative to capture what figured to be many more highlights from the springy No. 1 overall pick.

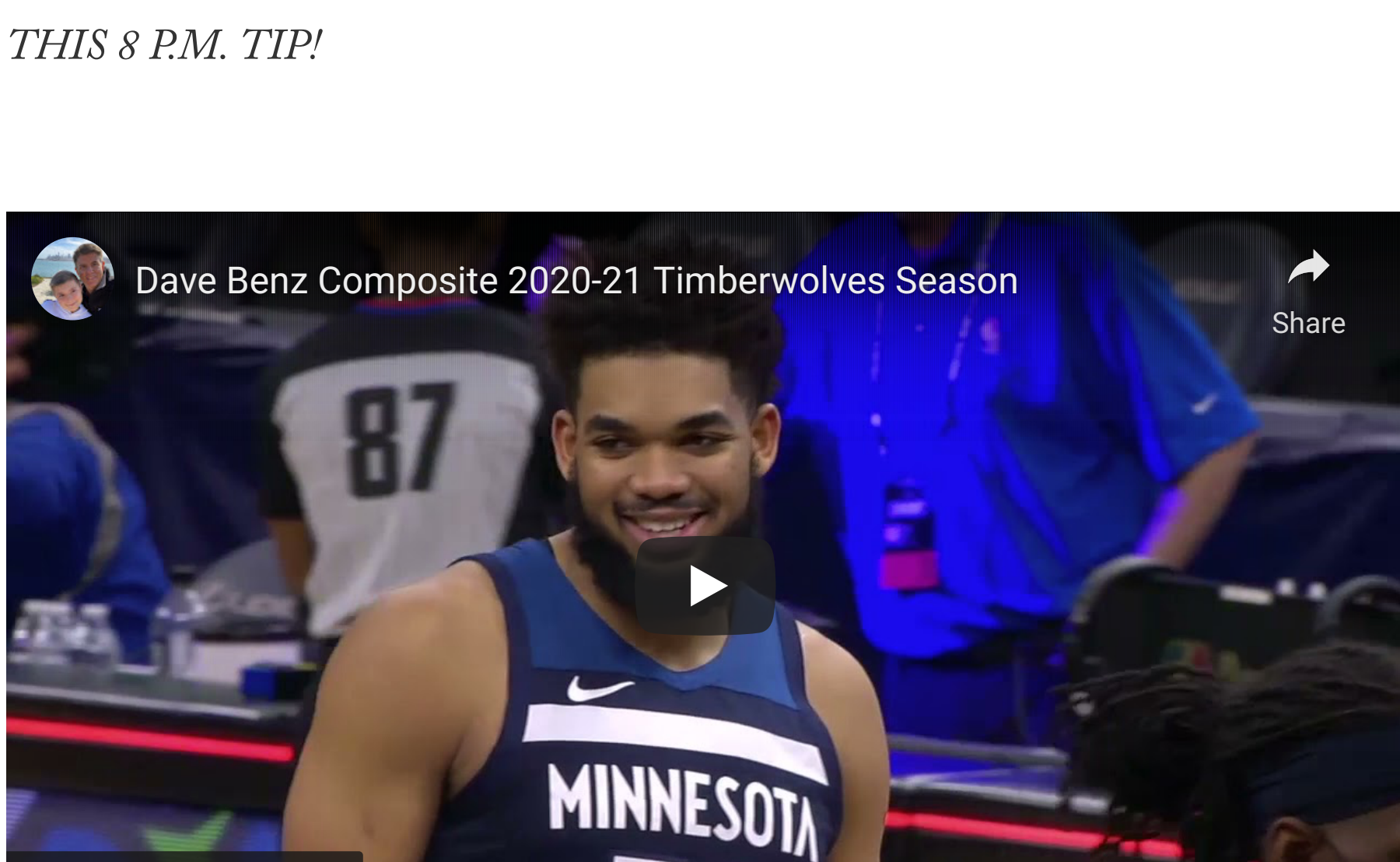
"I said, 'Boy, this kid really is amazing. He's going to have more special moments and I need to think of something that I can do that's special that's on par with what he's doing on the court,'" Benz said. "So the idea popped into my head. The first time I presented it to Jim he did not love it. But I went with it anyway."

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ANTS ARE MOST ACTIVE AT NIGHT SO ANT NO DOUBT IS LIKING THIS 8 P.M. TIP!



There were some idiosyncrasies, to be sure. Few announcers got more excited when an overmatched Timberwolves team got a deficit under 20 points in the second half. But in a league that can often be plagued by hometown announcers that are too far in the bag for the home team, Benz and Petersen gained a reputation for being on the level-headed end of the spectrum. When Towns committed a foul that he shouldn't have, Benz called it that way. When the Wolves lost on a last-second shot by Orlando's Cole Anthony, the disgust was palpable in Benz's voice.

"What a gut punch," Benz said.

For the first time in a long time, Benz and Petersen had a good team to call this season. The Wolves won 46 games in the regular season, beat the [Clippers](#) in the Play-In Tournament and took the [Memphis Grizzlies](#) to six games in the first round of the playoffs. It felt like the beginning of a return to relevance for the franchise, which is what made Benz look forward to the coming seasons even more.

"This year there was so much cohesiveness and so much likeability of the players and the coaches and everybody associated with the team," he said. "It just made it really enjoyable. There was a sense of inclusiveness as well. From Sachin Gupta to Chris Finch to all of the assistant coaches, to KAT and D-Lo and Ant, everybody on the roster, there was nobody that felt unapproachable or that I couldn't have a conversation with and if I asked a question, I got an answer."

Benz said one of the things he will miss most is his interaction with Timberwolves fans. He was active on Twitter and would often snap pictures with fans at Target Center and on the road.

"I really owe a debt of gratitude to the fans," he said. "The relationships with a lot of those people, and hopefully a lot of the fans, will continue well beyond this."

Benz will turn 53 on May 17. He said the experience here over the last decade has only reinforced his confidence that he will land on his feet. While taken aback by the timing of the decision, he said he will explore all of his options in the coming weeks and months. Bally's and the Timberwolves, meanwhile, will begin a national search for a replacement that is expected to quite some time.

"I don't want to say anything but positive things about the team and the network and the experience," Benz said. "I'm blessed to have been given my opportunity to have my hands on the wheel and be the soundtrack of this team for a decade. To be able to say that I had 10 years in the NBA, there's not a lot of people that can say that."

(Photo courtesy of Dave Benz)

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MEH



SOLID



AWESOME

Jon Krawczynski is a senior writer for The Athletic covering the Minnesota Timberwolves, the NBA and the Minnesota Vikings. Jon joined The Athletic after 16 years at The Associated Press, where he covered three Olympics, three NBA Finals, two Ryder Cups and the 2009 NFC championship game. Follow Jon on Twitter @JonKrawczynski