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Locals Scott Kaplan, Billy Ray Smith aim for laughs during morning commute



(Left) Scott Kaplan (Right) Billy Ray Smith

By Joe Tash

That's not to say females are unwelcome – several staffers, including the show's producer, are women. And Kaplan and Smith say they want their show to hold interest for both sexes. That's why, during a typical 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. show, discussion will include a wide range of topics, from the NFL draft, to the Padres' woes, to Mayor Jerry Sanders' lobbying the F-bomb at opponent Steve Francis after a recent debate.

But make no mistake, the core demographic of the show is men, most of who tune in on car radios during their morning commute.

"It's anything that's interesting to men 25 to 54," said Kaplan of the show's subject matter. Smith added he and his partner seek to give their listeners "ammo for the water cooler."

Kaplan, 38, a former college football kicker and broadcaster since 1996, and Smith, 46, a Chargers' defensive standout for 10 seasons, have held court during morning drive time for the past seven years, now on the Mighty XX, AM 1090. Kaplan lives locally with his wife and four children, as does Smith and his wife, Channel 10 newscaster Kimberly Hunt, and their teenage daughter.

The two say they avoid getting too immersed in the statistics of football, baseball, basketball and other sports, and instead try to capture the human side of the local and national sports scene. Along with a big dose of humor.

"I want to make sure every listener has laughed their asses off all morning long," Kaplan said.

One recent show featured a telephone interview with a woman who owned a pet store, and nearly wound up as lunch for one of her shop's large snakes.

Last Friday, the hosts had five minutes to guess which athlete was coached by a call-in guest, by asking only yes and no questions. After three minutes, listeners were brought into the game, and the identity of the athlete – suspended NFL cornerback Adam "Pacman" Jones, was ferreted out.

Smith and Kaplan spoke with Padres manager Bud Black by phone, expressing their continued support for the cellar-dwelling Friars, and laughed with veteran sportscaster Ted Leitner about Sanders' expletive-laced greeting for his opponent, and the mayor's refusal to disavow the statement.

Former Padres pitcher David "Boomer" Wells dropped by the studio to chat about the Padres, but he refused to take part in that morning's "Pizza Challenge," in which Smith, Kaplan and their guests rated slices from Bongiorno's Pizza, which has outlets in Solana Beach, Poway and San Diego. Wells, who is currently not signed with a big-league team, declined because he is undergoing a "cleanse," and sticking to healthy foods such as juices and salads.

"When I'm done I'll go beat up a pie," Wells said.

The pizza, which was enthusiastically wolfed down by the hosts and their other guests, earned a 4.5 out of 5 on the rating scale. Other pizza places will bring their wares by for judging in coming weeks. The Pizza Challenge followed a similar Burger Challenge, which was ultimately won by Cheers of Ramona.

"We figure there are enough genres of food we could have free food delivered to this studio for the rest of our lives," Smith said.

The Scott and BR Show goes out on a 50,000-watt transmitter, and can be heard throughout San Diego, Orange and Los Angeles counties, and as far north as Santa Barbara, Smith and Kaplan said. Occasionally, the signal reaches to the San Francisco Bay Area, when weather conditions are just right, Smith said.

If the two have any complaint, it's their work hours. They have to get up before 4 a.m. to make it on the air by 5 a.m. each morning, causing them to take daytime catnaps or just get by on a less-than-desired amount of sleep. And, as Kaplan pointed out, theirs is not the type of job you can ease into each morning, with a cup of coffee and the newspaper.

"This is 100mph from 4 a.m. to 9 a.m., then it's crash time," Kaplan said.

When they're not on the air, they have plenty to keep them occupied, from keeping up on the news and preparing material for their show, to overseeing several business and charitable enterprises. They co-own Great Friends Stable (named for their listeners, who are dubbed "great friends"), which buys, sells and trains horses for racing at the Del Mar track. They also own Make-Believe Marketing, a side venture that includes a video production team.

Recently, they launched the Scott and BR Great Friends Foundation, which raises money for local charities and scholarships.

In their off time, Smith might hit the gym or watch his daughter's volleyball games, while Kaplan is training for his second San Francisco to San Diego bicycle ride this fall to raise money for athletes with disabilities.

Both partners say they enjoy the San Diego lifestyle.

"[This] is the greatest place in the country to raise a family. I love living here," said Kaplan, who lived on the East Coast before moving to San Diego for his present job.

As for the show, Smith and Kaplan will continue to bring their brand of humor and sports knowledge to morning commuters. As Smith said during his sign-off last week, "Give us your ears for four hours and we'll stick something good in there."

"Seven years is a great run, and it's not close to being over," Kaplan said later.