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# ANN LIGUORI

## All-Star Sports Broadcaster

*By* **JULIE SAGOSKIN** *Photographed By* **NEIL TANDY**

Location provided by Ann & Keith Barish | Southampton, NY

She might have grown up playing sports in a boy's world, but with an all-star attitude, Ann Liguori always comes out swinging, whether it's on the golf course or in her career. Ann, a trailblazer and dynamo in sports broadcasting, owns her own content, is a sports talk show host, correspondent, Executive Producer, author, business owner and philanthropist. She's overcome tremendous obstacles in the male-dominated world of sports broadcasting and thrives in her field of choice. She's always had high aspirations, has achieved them all and is still going strong.

As a naturally gifted athlete, Ann could outrun the boys in her neighborhood, and she was often the first one picked to join any team. Upon entering junior high school, there were no sports for girls to compete in at the time at her school, except to join the cheerleading squad, so she and a friend put together a track team to compete in AAU meets. In high school, after Title IX was passed, Ann competed in volleyball in the fall, basketball in the winter and doubled in track and field and tennis in the spring, earning 16 Varsity letters. Her high school at the time didn't have a girl's tennis team, so she played on the boy's team and played #1 singles her senior year. Ann, who has always been an anomaly, enjoyed the challenge and won most of her matches.

"Sports is so important for girls and boys to learn and play," explained Ann. "It teaches skills that young people can use for the rest of their lives. I learned so much from being an athlete and competing in sports — how to win and lose, sportsmanship, how to deal with pressure and adversity. Plus, it's important to be physically fit! My parents were athletic, and my father was the Manager of my brother's Little League teams and encouraged us to pursue the sports we loved. They realized how

much sports meant to me and my Mom and Dad would drive us to all our practices and games, every day of the week."

Despite her talents playing a variety of sports, Ann never wanted to be a professional athlete. Rather, she had big dreams of becoming a sports broadcaster and talk show host. "When I was a little girl, I watched a woman named Ruth Lyons host a TV show in Cincinnati, where I was born. She was a trailblazer in the talk show genre, and she made a big impression on me at such an early age."

They might not have awarded many athletic scholarships to girls at the time where she grew up in Brecksville, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, but Ann was able to get an academic scholarship to the University of South Florida, in Tampa, Florida, where she walked on to the women's tennis team. Between her sports skills and smarts, Ann was well on her way to breaking into the broadcasting business. After being one of only 25 student graduates across the country to earn a fellowship with the International Radio and Television Society, Ann was able to follow her ambitions in the Big Apple. She started out at CBS Sports where she was an assistant and worked on The NFL Today Show and became a freelance statistician at Wimbledon and the US Open for HBO. Ann eventually became a freelance writer for the sports pages of USA Today in addition to working as a freelance producer for the ABC Sports Radio Network, where she made quite a memorable impression early on.

"I worked with the legendary sports commentator Howard Cosell during my stint at ABC Sports Radio Network. And during my first week there, much to the dismay of the studio engineer, I called Howard at home to advise him that he had made a mistake

in his commentary and asked if he could re-do that one line, and we'd edit it. The piece had aired before my shift and was going to be repeated and sent out to all the ABC radio affiliates later that afternoon. The engineer tried to talk me out of my calling Howard at home and asking Howard to re-do something!

And then when Howard actually answered the phone, the engineer almost fell out of his chair! I introduced myself and politely asked him to re-do the one line in his commentary. There was a long pause at the other end of the phone line and then I heard his iconic voice. He said to me, 'Do you know who I am young lady? This is Howard Cosell, I don't make mistakes.'

Well, how do I respond to that, I thought?! I quickly replied, 'Mr. Cosell, I realize you normally are flawless. If you re-do this one line, I can edit it and it WILL be perfect.' He sounded annoyed as he grunted a few times, but he ended up redoing the line and that was that!

I was 24 years old at the time and after hearing Howard's initial response, thoughts that my career would be over quickly if I couldn't get him to work with me raced through my head. There I was, calling one of the biggest names in sports broadcasting at home, a few days after I started working there. He was a very intimidating person; people shook in their shoes when Howard walked down the hallways at ABC. After that call, he never forgot my name and he always took the time to talk with me when I saw him in-person."

That nail-biting moment was one of many that have contributed to her success as Ann continued to blaze her own path in sports broadcasting.





Dress by Jackie Rogers

Ann's first on-air break was reporting on tennis at the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles for ABC Radio Sports Network. "I was hired as a producer at those Olympic Games and they needed someone to cover tennis, which was a demonstration sport back then. They knew I played tennis and was knowledgeable about the sport, so they sent me! After that, I became a 'stringer' for the Radio Network, covering every professional team in New York, interviewing the players, sending audio clips to the Network, reporting at the games. It was so much fun and a great way to meet a lot of people in the sports world."

In addition, Ann's entrepreneurial spirit kicked in and she put together a weekly sports commentary called 'Ann Liguori in the Line-Up' and brought in her own sponsor, Miller Lite, and her commentary was syndicated on radio stations throughout New England. "I enjoyed creating these commentaries and shows and connecting with sponsors to make it all happen. Plus, it helped pay the rent!"

In 1987, WFAN was launched, the first all-sports radio station in the country. Ann was asked to host a weekly show and 'Hey Liguori, What's the Story' was born. She became the first woman to host her own call-in sport's show there, which aired every weekend for over 25 years.

Ann continues to work for the station as their golf and tennis correspondent and during golf season, hosts a 'Talkin' Golf' Show. She has covered 21 consecutive Masters, US Open Golf Championships, PGA Championships, every Ryder Cup since Brookline in 1999 and 37 straight US Open Tennis Championships! Ann has also been a talk show host and correspondent at six Olympic Games, covering a variety of sports including men's and women's alpine, figure skating, hockey, track and field, basketball and gymnastics.

"I have so many stories from covering the Olympics, from interviewing both Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan as the entire world watched them compete against each other at the 1994 Winter Olympics just months after Harding's ex-husband orchestrated an attack on Kerrigan; doing play-by-play of skiers like Alberto Tomba, Herman Maier (the Hermanator) and his amazing comeback in winning an Olympic Gold Medal after his horrific wipe-out in 1998 at the Winter Olympics in Nagano, that I called, 'live,' on the air; to Lindsay Vonn, Bode Miller; being a color commentator during the USA women's basketball final in the 1998 Summer Olympics, which set the stage for the creation of the WNBA."

This trailblazer, who created many of her own opportunities in sports broadcasting, has seen more opportunities open-up for women through the years. "But real progress will

be made when more women run sports networks and companies and emerge in decision-making capacities."

Though it wasn't easy, Ann transitioned into the television sphere. A programming executive at MSG Network told her she loved her work and could offer her a weekly time slot for a show but couldn't pay her. Ann saw a window of opportunity and grabbed it. Ann soon made her mark creating, hosting, producing, selling and distributing her own weekly show, 'Sports Innerview with Ann Liguori.'

She put her own production company together and Sports Innerview featured Ann interviewing an 'A List' of sports legends from Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams, Wilt Chamberlain and Jim Brown, Bart Starr and Gordie Howe, to Billie Jean King, Arthur Ashe, Annika Sorenstam, Wayne Gretzky, Jimmy Connors and Brett Favre. Ann interviewed over 400 legends for this show alone.

'Sports Innerview with Ann Liguori' first aired on MSG Network and then Ann started clearing and distributing the show on regional sports cable networks throughout the country. Ann pounded down doors on Madison Avenue, got meetings with top advertising executives and despite much resistance, was able to get sponsors for the show including Volvo, Dunkin' Donuts, Federal Express and long-time support from Sharp Electronics who came in as the show's title sponsor and Tourism Ireland and Travelers, who continue to sponsor Ann's radio shows.

"The Sports Innerview show is my legacy," says Liguori. "To put this award-winning weekly cable show together from A to Z: hosting, producing, acquiring the sponsors, distributing, syndicating, researching, booking the guests and maintaining the rights to the content; it aired for 17 years and required intense focus, commitment and a skill set that I didn't know I had! It was immensely challenging but incredibly rewarding to create this treasure chest of content."

"Many of the advertising executives I was able to meet with, looked at me as if I had three heads! They couldn't understand the concept of a woman hosting or getting sponsors for my own show back then. For every sponsor who said 'yes,' I had 20 other doors slammed in my face, but it all worked out beautifully through the years as I learned how to maneuver around the obstacles and stayed positive."

The 'Sports Innerview with Ann Liguori' cable show aired during the years that Ann was also hosting her weekly 'Hey Liguori, What's the Story' show on WFAN-NY. "It was an incredibly hectic time in my career but so exhilarating!"

And on top of those two shows, another opportunity came



her way. Ann became one of the ‘original’ hosts on The Golf Channel with her own prime-time show, Conversations with Ann Liguori. Ann interviewed a long A-list of celebrities, including Sylvester Stallone, Celine Dion, Matthew McConaughey, Kevin Costner, Joe Pesci, Smokey Robinson, Charles Schulz of Peanuts fame, Amy Grant, Vince Gill, to name a few, while golfing with them. In many cases, the backstory was just as entertaining as the story that aired on her show.

“I would golf with a different celebrity every episode. I would be on a golf course with Kevin Costner and the next week it was Johnny Bench, or Jim Brown or Joe Pesce. I booked guests from the worlds of Hollywood, music, business, sports. I really enjoyed using golf as a vehicle to get to know these personalities.

My first show for The Golf Channel was with Sylvester Stallone, and I had to convince him that it was going to be about golf, not about his personal life. The Golf Channel wasn’t on the air yet and I was shooting several shows to put them in the can, as we say, before the network launched. Jim McLean, well-known golf instructor and a friend, who had heard I was going to be hosting this show, called me on a Sunday to ask if I wanted to fly down to the Doral Hotel in Miami, where he was the head of the Learning Center there, as he was going to be giving Stallone a golf lesson the very next day.

I quickly grabbed a suitcase and while rushing to JFK in a taxi to catch a flight to Miami, I called and hired a production crew based in Miami, got in touch with my stylist and put the shoot together in a matter of minutes.

Early Monday morning my production crew set up in a gorgeous room at the spa at the Doral. As soon as we were ready, Jim McLean called me from the Pro Shop. ‘I have good news and bad news,’ he said. ‘The good news is Sylvester Stallone is here. The bad news is he doesn’t want to do the interview because he doesn’t know what The Golf Channel is.’

I didn’t panic although I had invested the money to hire the crew and I knew there had to be a way to make it happen so I jumped in a golf cart and raced from the Spa to the driving range where Stallone had gotten out of his limo to hit balls.

I approached Stallone on the range, and introduced myself and explained what The Golf Channel was all about, that it was going to go on the air in less than a week and that the interview would be about his passion for golf and what he brings from his career to the game. He never hesitated in saying, ‘Okay, let’s do it!’ But at that point my crew had broken down all their equipment and followed me to the range. Always the perfectionist, I wanted it to be set up back in the beautiful spa with perfect lighting, not on the range where I was convincing Stallone to do the show. So, I asked my stylist to stall him for a bit while my crew went back to the Spa to set up again. Once we were about to start, Stallone’s agent was pacing behind the cameras and told me I only had five minutes! I explained to the agent that the show was a half-hour long and that I needed at least 30 minutes for the interview and then we would follow Stallone around on the golf course and get footage of him playing and having some fun. The agent finally agreed. I knew my first question had to be one that would make Stallone and his agent relax. So, I said, ‘Sylvester, you’re a movie man extraordinaire, you collect art, you write novels, you play polo and now golf. You’re such a Renaissance Man…’

You could see him immediately relax. His body language changed. He smiled and off we went on an interview adventure. He was wonderful! Very engaging. Very bright! And he loved talking about golf and his success story. He enjoyed the interview just as much as I did, apparently. After we finished, he told me, he was ready for his sequel!”

Another memorable moment on the golf course occurred when Ann played with Celine Dion and her late husband, Rene Angelil. The power couple, who had purchased a public golf course and turned it into their own private retreat, opened-up about how they used golf as a way to spend quality time

together. “The show is more about using golf as a vehicle to get to know people,” explained Ann. “A guy I worked with when I was a freelance statistician for HBO at the US Open and Wimbledon, Michael Whelan, had been following my career and called me to ask if I’d be interested in creating and hosting a show for them on this new ‘Golf Channel’ network. With no hesitation, I came up with the idea of the show, over the phone, in about five minutes. I knew it would be fascinating. I’m grateful to Michael that he believed in me and reached out. “Conversations with Ann Liguori’ aired for the first six years of The Golf Channel’s inception and all these years later, I still have people tell me how much they enjoyed the show!”

In her book titled A Passion for Golf: Celebrity Musings about the Game, Ann shares many stories and the interviews from this show and poignant behind-the-scenes stories with the many stars she connected with.

Throughout her career, Ann has spoken with great storytellers in the sports world, including Wilt Chamberlain, who claimed in his book that he had slept with 20,000 women, as well as famed football player Jim Brown, who had become incensed when a caller on Ann’s show on WFAN, asked about allegations that he had thrown his girlfriend off of a balcony at his home in the Hollywood Hills. From Mickey Mantle and Ted Williams to Smokey Robinson, Pete Rose, Brett Favre and Gordie Howe, Ann has many interviews under her belt in which her guests open-up and reveal sides of themselves, seldom seen or talked about.

The next step for Ann is to host and produce a documentary about her career and the many legends she has interviewed, and tell the many ‘stories behind the stories’ about her own storied career, and the careers of the many legends she has, and still, connects with. Ann is also working on another book to “preserve these timeless stories and interviews” so that many people, both young and old, can enjoy them and learn from this treasure chest of history.



Top by analili  
Pant by Mesmerize  
Necklace, Earrings, Bracelets and Ring on right hand  
by Hamptons Rope Collection | [dunejewelry.com](http://dunejewelry.com)





Cashmere sweater by Le Superbe | Jeans by Escada | Sunglasses by Peakvision | Ear rings, Bracelets and Ring by Hamptons Rope Collection | dunejewelry.com

Ann splits her time between her homes in the Orlando area and Westhampton. She is as passionate about her philanthropic efforts as she is about her production company.

Ann lost her father to stomach cancer while she was still in college before tragedy struck again just a year and a half later when her brother, Jim, passed away from leukemia. She was asked to host a charity golf tournament for the American Cancer Society 21 years ago and 11 years ago, The Ann Liguori Foundation was founded, raising money for a variety of not-for-profits that focus on cancer research and prevention. Just this past June, she hosted the 21st Annual Ann Liguori Foundation Charity Golf Classic at Westhampton Country Club. Every year, the charity golf tournament is held at a prestigious golf course in The Hamptons. Friar's Head, Maidstone, Atlantic, Sebonack Golf Club, The Bridge, are some of the courses that have hosted Ann's popular golf outing.

The Ann Liguori Foundation also created the Ann Liguori Foundation Sports Media Scholarship that NY-Women and Communications (WICI) administer every year for college students hoping to pursue a career in sports media and the Ann Liguori Foundation supports the Association for Women in Sports Media (AWSM) Champions Mentorship Program.

After living in New York City for 25 years and enjoying The Hamptons on the weekends, Ann moved to The Hamptons full-time, where she shares a home with her significant-other of 15 years, Scott Vallary, her best friend and golf partner, and their 14-year-old golden retriever, Skye. "I love the beauty and tranquility of the Hamptons and using my office here as my home base and studio works out nicely. I enjoy heading into Manhattan for meetings and events, but I prefer living on the East End."

Ann shares in the care of her 93-year-old mother, Cecilia, with her two siblings, Jean and Dan. Ann describes her Mom as "my biggest inspiration and strength" and knows that "family is the most important thing in life. My family, including my sister Jean and brother-in-law Steve, my brother Dan, my niece Madison, nephew Christian and

Scott's family, all try to get together as much as we can. Family is everything! I cherish the time we all spend together."

As a businesswoman, Ann is also a Brand Ambassador for Dune Jewelry, as well as Peakvision Sunglasses, which she described as "the best lens of any sunglasses I've ever worn. It's like seeing in high definition. They are great for golf or any sport. I wear them all the time."

Ann collaborated with Dune Jewelry CEO and Designer Holly Daniels Christensen on a sophisticated jewelry collection they named the 'Hamptons Rope Collection,' which includes a necklace, earrings, a bracelet, ring and cufflinks. With each piece, you can select sand from your favorite beach or golf course which are incorporated into the hand-crafted jewelry pieces. Customers can either choose sand from the thousands of beaches on their web site from all over the world or send in their own element. Here is the link to view and order the collection: <https://dunejewelry.com/collections/hamptons-long-island-rope-jewelry>

"When we started this collection, Holly, who's an incredibly talented designer and dynamo business woman, asked me what my tastes were in jewelry and we came up with a gorgeous line that reflects the elegance and style of The Hamptons. Each piece has a nautical feel to it with roping around the perimeter of the designs. "It's amazing how different and how beautiful the sand is from each location. Some of the sand that I wear in the pieces include sand from Doonbeg Golf Club, a club I've been a member of since they opened, in southwest Ireland; sand from Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland where they hosted the Open Championship this past July; sand from the Abaco Club in the Bahamas; sand from Westhampton Beach near where I live; and sand from the pink beaches in Bermuda. I'm also involved in DuneGolf.com in which they make ball markers, divot tools, wine stoppers, key chains and many other pieces with sand from a golf course on one side and the club's logo on the other.

Ann enjoys playing golf around the world and accepts invites to play in celebrity, charity

tournaments and pro-ams. Ann was one of a few female celebrities to play in the Bob Hope Classic, a PGA Tour event held in LaQuinta, California, when she competed in 2011. She's a regular competitor in the Scotty Medlock-Robby Krieger Invitational, the Steve Azar Delta Soul, the Team Gamaz Foundation Charity Golf Classic, the Marty Lyons Foundation Golf Tourney, the Ed Lucas Foundation Golf Classic, to name a few, and in 2020, Ann will also play in the BMW Charity Pro-Am.

Ann is an Ambassador for Tourism Ireland and this past July, after covering the Open Championship held at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland, Ann was part of a golf media trip where they played stunning links and parkland courses in Donegal, Sligo and outside of Dublin. A few years ago, Ann visited South Africa with Pro Golf Africa Safaris where she played 7 courses, went on 5 safaris and visited a number of wineries in Stellenbosch. Ann co-hosted with Chip Beck, a Premier Golf - Viking River Cruise after the 2018 Ryder Cup, from Paris to Normandy. "Chip is one of golf's greatest Ambassadors and it was an honor to be on this river cruise with Chip and his wife, Karen."

Ann is also involved in helping to grow the game of golf. The United States Adaptive Golf Alliance (USAGA) and their member-organizations connect people with disabilities to golf instruction and tournaments. "Individuals who overcome a disability to learn the game are so inspiring and to see the joy on their faces when they play, is heart-warming."

How has Ann sustained such a successful and longstanding career? "Having a passion for what you do is the key," says Ann. "Having an unlimited imagination helps as well as drive, determination, an intense work ethic and a positive attitude. You know the saying, 'when the going gets tough, the tough get going.' That's so true in our competitive world. Everyone's journey includes up and downs. Don't let the 'downs' defeat you. Pick yourself up and reach for the sky."

The sky is indeed the limit for this star sports broadcaster, who has interviewed some of the world's biggest athletes and entertainers and who has become quite the legend in her own right. ♦