

Jim Nantz was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, and relocated multiple times as a young boy. He went to high school in New Jersey prior to attending the University of Houston (UH) where he was recruited as a member of the golf team. During his junior year as a radio and television broadcasting major, he got his first opportunity with KTRH radio and Houston's CBS affiliate, KHOU 11, where he did studio work covering local sports. Then, he became an anchor at KSL-TV in Salt Lake City. While in Utah, he also broadcast Utah Jazz basketball games and did play-by-play with Steve Young for Brigham Young University football games. In 1985, the national CBS Network offered him a job, and he has been there ever since, covering golf, the National Football League (NFL), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men's Basketball Tournament. He has called six Super Bowls, thirty-eight Masters' tournaments, and thirty-seven NCAA basketball tournaments, with his final one taking place in 2023. Nantz is a proud Houston Cougar and now resides in Tennessee and California.

In November 2022, UH history student and sports enthusiast Steven Miller had a dream come true when Jim Nantz agreed to be interviewed for the 100 Years of Stories: Documenting a Century at the University of Houston project. The two discussed Nantz's time at UH, how it molded him into a successful sports broadcaster, the Cougar basketball program, and UH Athletics' move to the Big 12 Conference.¹

Steven Miller: What led you to the University of Houston and how would you describe your time there?

Jim Nantz: I came to the University of Houston in the fall of 1977. I was introduced to the school by a former famous golfer who played on national championship teams for the legendary coach, Dave Williams. His name was Ron Weber. ... He made a phone call and said, "I think you should take a look at this kid. He's got some game, but what he really wants to do is to come to school to study sports broadcasting." The next day Coach Williams



The Man Calling the Shots: A Conversation with UH Alumnus and Sports Commentator Jim Nantz *By Steven Miller*

Jim Nantz is recognized as a major voice for the sports world and the University of Houston family. A multi-E Emmy-award winner, he was inducted into the Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame, and the Pro Football and Naismith Memorial Basketball Halls of Fame. He received an Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters and the Distinguished Alumni Award from UH.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.

it can't happen. You've got the game that is suited for that course. You have the passion, the desire, [and] the ability." In 1992, he won the Masters. If I was to say that I wanted to work for CBS one day, ... which I said quite often, my teammates and friends made me feel like that was completely

attainable and believable. They helped me get there. My goal was to one day broadcast the Masters, the NFL, and the Super Bowl, and all those dreams have come true. They wouldn't have if I wasn't at the

David Williams coached UH Men's Golf from 1952 to 1987, winning sixteen national championships and becoming a collegiate golf legend. Nantz credits Williams and the golf team's support for his early development as a sports commentator. In 1980, the UH men's golf team won the Southwest Conference championship. Standing left to right: Ray Barr, John Horne, and Fred Couples; and kneeling: Terry Snodgrass, Coach Williams, and Blaine McCallister.

Photo courtesy of Houstonian, 1980 Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.





In 1979, Nantz (seated second from the right) lived in Taub Residence Hall, which was part of the original Quad dormitory complex.

Photo courtesy of Houstonian, 1979 Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

University of Houston around people that were positive, supportive, and emboldening me to maximize my abilities.

SM: It sounds like you were with some influential people. You said that you always wanted to be a part of sports broadcasting. Where did you get that passion?

JN: ... For me, it was watching sports events at home, listening to the voices of my youth, and just [being] completely awestruck at their ability to tell a story and take me places I could only dream of visiting. ... They made the world feel like it was small and that people from different cultures were so similar to ours. ... Live television in my youth was different from live television today. ... Back in my days as a young boy growing up and even in my college years, the world seemed like a very spacious and faraway place. Your ability to be able to see it all sounded a bit far-fetched, but I had people at Houston who supported what I was thinking. They were all in on what I wanted, and they helped me get there.

SM: Today, the hot topic around the university is the basketball team. How would you say the Phi Slama Jama days [1982-1984] influenced college basketball?

JN: The [UH] basketball program ended up being my entry way into the business. My golf coach, Dave Williams, introduced me to Guy Lewis, the legendary Hall of Fame basketball coach. Coach Lewis asked me to be the public address announcer at what is now called Fertitta Center [formerly Hofheinz Pavilion.] ... I was telling people to stand for the national anthem, introducing starting lineups, and all that went with that job. ... It also led me to hosting Guy Lewis's television show. ... That was a big opportunity for a kid, just a sophomore in college. So, the basketball program ... was my gateway to my career.

We are a basketball program with a deep and rich history. It is all connected from Elvin Hayes and Don Chaney [the first Black UH basketball players] in the sixties ... to

Phi Slama Jama teams, which was my time in school with Clyde [Drexler], Hakeem [Olajuwon], Michael Young, Larry Micheaux, Alvin Franklin, Benny Anders, Rob Williams, and Reid Gettys. These were great, great friends of mine, still to this day. I gave Clyde his nickname, "Clyde the Glide." ... To see the program that they helped rise to such prominence and to see it return, we're a bunch of proud Cougars today.

SM: Love to hear that. If I'm not mistaken, this is your last year calling the Final Four.

JN: It is, and I hate to give anything up. I'll still maintain my NFL role with Tony Romo and golf, but after thirty-seven years calling the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament and being a part of it, it's time someone else [got] the opportunity. ... I'm enjoying the ride, ... but I got to tell you, I'm enjoying it a lot more now that our basketball program has been Elite Eight, Final Four, [and] Sweet Sixteen the last three years. We're in a good place. ... It feels like my youth all over again.

SM: Do you see any similarities between the 1982-84 teams and now? Basketball has changed so much since then.

JN: You have got to remember back when Phi Slama Jama was around, we didn't have the three-point shot. That didn't come into college basketball until 1987. The game was radically changed by that, but I know this, we're tenacious. [UH basketball coach] Kelvin [Sampson] has his team fighting for every loose ball. We're always a great rebounding team. ... I love the way this team plays. It's a scrappy bunch that is always prepared and that is always fighting for everything.

I'm proud of the way we play, and it all starts with Kelvin. ... When he first arrived, his belief was that we had the potential to come back again. ... We were really left for dead. We went thirty years without even competing in the NCAA tournament. Then Tommy Penders got us back into the tournament [and] started building up the program. But along comes Kelvin, ... and he's faithful to the old guard from the UH. It's a family business with him, which I love. ... I've always felt like we as Cougars are united, so we need a basketball program that embodies the vibe of the school.



While still a student, Jim Nantz hosted Coach Guy V. Lewis's show on Houston's NBC affiliate, KPRC on channel 2.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.



On April 3, 2016, UH men's basketball coach Kelvin Sampson, Jim Nantz, and UH women's basketball coach Ron Hughey, shown center left to right, join student athletes at the opening of the Guy V. Lewis Development Facility for the basketball programs. Photo courtesy of UH athletics.

... We're family, and Kelvin has, in perfect harmony, brought that to our basketball team.

SM: After graduating from the University of Houston, you got a job in Salt Lake City, is that correct?

JN: Yeah ... I was working in the Houston market. I had some amazing opportunities with KTRH radio and KHOU Channel 11. ... I went to Salt Lake City a year out of college and left behind some very good jobs, ... but I felt like I needed to go sharpen my skills somewhere else. In Salt Lake City I was given the opportunity to do play by play. ... I didn't want to just be a studio host. I wanted to call games, the Super Bowl, the Final Four, and the Masters! ... [N]ot many people get to call a Super Bowl.

Out of the blue after two years [in Salt Lake City], I got a call from the network, and CBS had been running a national talent hunt. They had been taping my shows unannounced to me and asked me to come back as one of five people to audition for a role. This was in August of 1985, and fortunately... I won the audition.

SM: It's like everything you sought, you did. Can you tell me how you felt when you found out you were going to call your first Super Bowl?

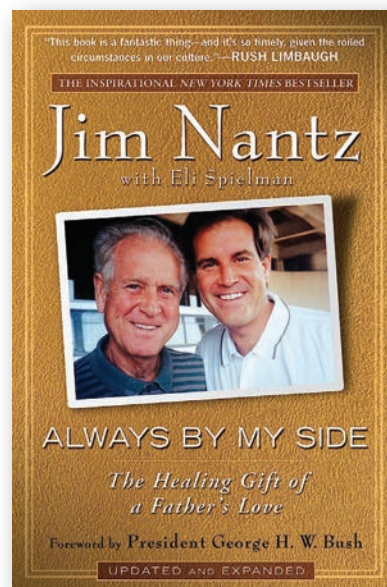
JN: That didn't happen until I was about twenty years at the network. ... [I]t's the biggest show in television, ... there will be 150 million people that are going to tune in. It is overwhelming. I try not to deal with that mentally because it's just too big. If you try to see what 150 million people look like in one place, you could not find a way to physically see that. You get to a point, though, in your career where you [can] trick your mind into not thinking that. You get skilled enough to get lost in the broadcast, and you let what you

prepared for ... just take over ... instincts, your ability, and your experience tosses all that bigness aside.

I always like to feel it doesn't matter if I'm calling the Super Bowl or the lowest-rated golf tournament we have that year, I'm still going to give it the same exact effort level. You never know who's watching, and why wouldn't you give it your best? There aren't nights off [or] broadcasts that you take off. It's live television. You have to navigate your way through it and be prepared for it.

SM: Now that you said that it made me try to imagine 150 million [people]. I just can't.

JN: Yeah, it's crazy ... I always tried to talk to one person. I've always tried looking into that lens and think I'm talking to my father. That's why I say, "Hello Friends!" because that is a line that I mentioned to my father when he was incapacitated



Jim Nantz released his book *Always By My Side: The Healing Gift of a Father's Love* in 2008, detailing his father's impact on his journey to becoming a successful sports broadcaster. Nantz's opening line, "Hello Friends," began as a special message to his father.

Photo courtesy of Penguin Random House Publishing.



Jim Nantz meets with legendary UH head coaches. Left to right: Rolan Walton, former baseball player (1947-1951) and coach (1975-1986); David Williams, men's golf coach (1952-1987); Jim Nantz; Bill Yeoman, football coach (1962-1986); and Guy V. Lewis, former player (1946-48) and men's basketball coach (1956-1986).

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.

with Alzheimer's. I told him, "Dad, if you can remember this, ... this weekend I'm going to open up my broadcast with saying 'Hello Friends!' and that means that at that very moment, I'm talking to you. I want you to know that's my special signal that I'm thinking of you, and I love you." ... It freed me, relaxed me, and made me feel that I was talking to him. It enabled me to have a nice little moment of gratitude that I can feel that connection more with my father at that moment in time.

SM: I have to ask. Is an announcer's jinx real? You supposedly experienced one Thanksgiving Day [2022].

JN: That was one of the all-time ones! ... I set it up just perfectly ... "Don't talk to me about any silly announcer jinx, so and so hasn't missed all year long [on] a field goal or a PAT." ... [I]t was only a 29-yard attempt, ... and it goes wide left, ... you have one of the most hilarious moments in the history of the NFL ... [Many people] think I have some sort of influence on affecting that moment, obviously I can't ... [I]t's not like [the kicker] could hear me. ... It did bring on some really good reactions. My boy [Tony] Romo apologized to all the Lions fans ... but it was a great moment in television. I loved it.

SM: Can you speak on UH's move to the Big 12 and what it means for athletics and the whole university?

JN: This is a long overdue recognition for our university. ... We should have been in the conference from the get-go. ... There are a lot of people who have worked on it behind the scenes. Our athletic director, Chris Pezman, was brilliant through all of that navigating. So was Dr. [Renu] Khator, [and] Tilman [Fertitta] has been an unbelievable backer. In the decision-making process, ... we had a lot of people believing in the Cougars.

We will make the Big 12 a better conference. It is indisputable our football team will be able to compete. ... As far as the basketball program, we deserve to be in the best conference available. ... We had to upgrade everything about our athletic teams and facilities. ... [T]his affects the golf team, the baseball team, ... all the women's sports that we have at our school, which is a vital part of our history of Houston. It's going to be gigantic.

SM: One last question, what does the University of Houston mean to you?

JN: Everything. My whole life was launched as a student athlete at the University of Houston. My best friendships in life were formed there. ... I know what it's like to have been a Houston Cougar, to have had the many thrilling victories and painful losses.

I am proud of our school for all that it represents. ... We are the most ethnically diverse university in the country. I am really proud we give people opportunity and people have made their lives through our school. ... We have had tremendous leadership and vision. ... We are a family of almost 40,000 strong, but I feel like it's a family of forty strong because you know everybody. I really believe in the next half century, with all the things that are now falling in place: the growth of the school, the stature of our academic standing, our medical school commitment, our Big 12 entrance. ... the University of Houston is going to be recognized as the greatest university in the land. It's not entitlement, ... it's that the potential is there and now the potential is going to be realized. We are opening up that opportunity, and I'm just so thrilled to see it all coming into existence. 🇺🇸



During the 2023 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, Jim Nantz received proclamations from the State of Texas, Harris County, City of Houston, and University of Houston Alumni Association (UHAA). Shown left to right as Nantz receives the key to the city: UHAA president Mike Pede, Mayor Sylvester Turner, CBS Sports lead reporter Tracy Wolfson, and Jim Nantz.

Photo courtesy of CBS Sports and Nantz Enterprises.