

(David Stern has kept himself busy in retirement with several different ventures.)

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TECH-SAVVY DAVID STERN FINDING WAYS TO STAY IN FOREFRONT, EVEN IN RETIREMENT

It's early still, but late enough somewhere that David Stern could be into his second or third umbrella drink by now.

And since it's been more than three years since Stern stepped down as NBA commissioner, he truly could be anywhere. A Hawaiian shirt, a cabana chair, some sun, some surf, all would seem proper rewards for a job well done.

Nope. Stern, 74, was in the Manhattan office he keeps these days, not far from the Manhattan office he kept at Olympic Tower for so many years. Neckties are optional now, but he still pulls from a vast closet full of Stern Collection suits, remnants from his commish days.

He was at work, not all that different from some of his previous work, wrangling the telephone, bantering with media folks, making sure his message was clear if maybe a little less loud.

One of Stern's many new ventures is the tech start-up SportsCastr.Live, a streaming video platform that allowed users to call live games themselves or hear announcers of their choosing.

Or as Stern put it, "Fans want what they want, on whatever



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device they want it, whenever they want it."

A founding investor, Stern spoke of the "second-screen experience" the SportsCastr.Live developers had in mind.

"It's a combination of people wanting to be in the action and also, you see so much 'personalization,'" he said. "Whether it's the blogger you choose to read, the podcast you choose to listen to, the Facebook feed you choose to follow, the Twitter account you line up with, Instagram, there seems to something for everyone in the social media space. And this is one more possibility, which happens to feed off video and broadcast."

Underlying the project is the premise that watching sports is a social experience, even for someone alone at home. Eventually, the whole "second screen" could merge with the first screen so SportsCastr.Live could work as a picture-in-picture component of a game broadcast.

So one could summon Marv Albert from his quiet dinner in North Beach to call a game that the network has assigned to Mike Breen? Uh, not quite.

"It's more about 'young Marv' in a basement some place calling the game so he can sharpen his skills so he can be a great announcer," Stern said. SportsCastr.Live will allow a budding sportscaster to overlay streams carrying enhancements that update in real time and lend a professional look to the presentation.

'He really sees the big picture'

A viewer could pluck his choice of play-by-play calls from a crowd-sourced list of announcers. Or fans of a given national team limited to an English-speaking broadcast, for example, could seek out and hear instead someone calling the event from their native land. And all of this could link up with Facebook or Twitter or some other social-media account to involve friends.

Stern is just one of SportsCastr.Live's high-profile partners.



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Other include Syracuse men's basketball coach Jim Boeheim and NFL tight end Vernon Davis.

"He really sees the big picture and has helped with positioning and the overall vision," SportsCastr.Live CEO Kevin April said of Stern. "I know what David likes about this too is, any technology that connects people and drives people to watching the live games -- when it's so easy just to get the highlights on Snapchat or YouTube now -- anything that facilitates that social experience that we know sports are, he's all about."

Stern has been a curious consumer of and investor in technology for much of his working life. "We used to call the NBA a learning organization," he said. "We were always pushing and learning. We did it when cable came in, making our first cable deal in, I think, 1979. We did it with satellite. We did it with digital cable. Frankly, we did it when this thing called the Internet came in with NBA.com. And we did it when social media was upon us.

"Now there's another generation of evolution, I would call it, in the way fans want to absorb their sports."

Stern has absorbed much about streaming, virtual reality, interactive viewing and artificial intelligence. But that doesn't necessarily mean he's a "true believer." Relative to analytics, he still sees the value in eye tests, "hot hands," teammate relationships and body language. He wonders about the potential for data overload, with so much coming so fast. He also suspects the role of the coach could be usurped, or at least significantly changed, the deeper this goes.

One ironic aspect of this endeavor is Stern becoming a colleague now of Donald Schupak, a name that might resonate with some longtime NBA fans. Schupak, also 74 and a founding investor, represented Ozzie and Daniel Silna back in 1976. Those two brothers, who owned owned the Spirits of St. Louis ABA team, negotiated what long has been billed as the greatest deal in sports history.



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When the NBA was merging with the ABA that year -- and dissolving all but four franchises (San Antonio Spurs, Denver Nuggets, Indiana Pacers, New Jersey Nets) -- Schupak advised the Silnas that they could do better than the $3 million buyout the established league was offering. Instead, on top of a $2.2 million payment, he negotiated a slice of future TV revenue paid out of the surviving ABA teams' shares "in perpetuity." Those last two words proved fortuitous, to the tune of annual payments estimated at more than $300 million over time. In 2014, the NBA, after repeated attempts through the years, got the Silnas to accept a reported settlement of $500 million on top of the earlier payouts.

"I've been friendly with Donald since 1976, even though he was on the other side of the transaction," Stern said. "I had contact with him usually in an adversarial position, but we remained cordial and professional throughout it all. I ran into him and he said he had something we should talk about.

"So I said, 'What d'ya got?' He told he had invested a fair amount in this and what it could do. I had no idea what he was talking about, but we had a second meeting with this young man, Kevin April, who has babied this thing. Gradually, I came to understand it -- my deficiency, not theirs -- and they and it convinced me that this is something that could become a tremendous adjunct sports deal in social-media way."

Stern not lacking for responsibilities

Every so often, when talking about the NBA, a "we" slips into Stern's conversation. He still represents the league internationally on occasion. But as he told the Associated Press the other day, "Nobody calls [at night], nobody goes into the stands, nobody goes after their coach, nobody bumps an official. My life has been purified."

In addition to his interest in SportsCastr.Live and LiveLikeVR, a virtual reality company, Stern stays busy with multiple gigs. He is a senior advisor to Greycroft Partners, a venture capital fund that invests in "early-stage Internet and mobile companies." He



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serves in the same capacity with PJT Partners, a global investment bank, and advises the technology, media and telecommunications group of PricewaterhouseCoopers.

A few years ago, there had been some talk about Stern becoming an ambassador to a foreign nation. But he seems to prefer his public profile in the private sector.

“That’s not me,” he said. “I support in the political sphere. But I’m having too much fun now.

“I’m as busy as I’ve ever been, day to day. Actually, it’s great fun to be able to evolve with media developments. And it keeps you learning.”