

Tom Leyden bids farewell to Detroit

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SOUTHFIELD (WXYZ) - Ten a half years ago, on a fall football Friday, I walked through the doors of Broadcast House and was immediately surrounded by legends - none bigger than the man literally sitting in my seat when I strolled into the sports office.

Bo Schembechler had just finished taping a Big Ten Ticket with Don Shane. He stood up, shook my hand and said, "Hello young man. Welcome to Michigan!"

I should have taken that encounter for what it was - a perfect, momentary synopsis of how awesome the next decade of my life would be.

I met people I never dreamed I would meet. I covered events that sports fans drool over. Just check 'em off: Super Bowl, MLB All-Star Game, NBA All-Star Game, two Stanley Cup Finals, five Final Fours, one NBA Finals, the PGA Championship, IndyCar races at Belle Isle, NASCAR races at MIS, two World Series, two no-hitters, an imperfect perfect game by Armando Galarraga.

I witnessed the first triple crown in baseball in more than 40 years. Michigan and Ohio State, undefeated, head to head, #1 and #2 in the country. A Rose Bowl. How can I forget the Rose Bowl? Probably my favorite trip of all. And of course, the Lions in London last fall.

WXYZ has sent me around the world, and when we cover things, we go after it.

I remember standing in a parking lot outside the old RCA Dome in Indianapolis, getting ready to report on the women's National Championship Game in 2005 - a pretty big story as MSU was playing Baylor that night.

I was the sixth story in the newscast, after our three stories about Tigers opening day, a live report from Rome where Mary Conway was covering Pope John Paul II's funeral and the breaking news that Peter Jennings was diagnosed with cancer. It made perfect sense, but I

couldn't believe a national championship game could get relatively buried like that.

But that's Michigan. There's never a dull day.

I could walk in the office and not know what I was going to do at 6 o'clock, and then boom - something would happen. TV is fun and exciting, but it's never more invigorating, or rewarding, than when something happens and our newsroom snaps into breaking news mode.

We have each other's backs, we help each other out, we round out a story from every angle with a passion that's palpable. Nothing else, not even standing on the sidelines at a football playoff game, gives me a bigger rush.

I heard some good advice once and I've always tried to follow it. I don't really work for WXYZ or for my bosses here. They sign the checks and they make the big decisions, but, really, I work for the viewers. I hope you felt that way.

I wanted to be here to inform you, to entertain you, to make you laugh every once in a while, but most important to represent you when I had to and ask the questions you wanted answered.

This business is weird, because if you're good, you get better every day. Something I do tomorrow, two years from now I'll look back at it and cringe because I'll realize I could have done it better. We all learn, we all improve (hopefully) and if you're not improving, you're not living right.

A quick story about how Michigan sucked us in. My wife and I came to Detroit in 2004 driving a Honda and a Toyota. There is no chance you'll see us doing that again. Now I know the people who engineer the cars. I'm friends with the guy who makes the glue that keeps parts of your car together. I've had beers with some amazing people who work at the assembly plants and they were all awesome to me.

How could I possibly buy a foreign car when I have such a personal connection with the heartbeat of the Motor City?

Thank you for converting me. Thank you for caring enough to watch on TV. Thank you for saying hello when you saw me out and about. You've given my family an amazing 10 1/2 years and we'll carry so many of you with us forever.

Stay in touch. Follow on Twitter and Facebook and if you're in Boston, give me a shout! Maybe we can grab a drink at Fenway or some seafood at Faneuil Hall. Heck - maybe the Lions and Patriots will meet in the Super Bowl some day - a man can dream, right?

That's a good place to end, because I feel like I've lived a dream side-by-side with you for the last 11 seasons.

Thank you for being with me every step of the way and so long!