

Home » CBB » Billy Packer (1940-2023)

# Billy Packer (1940-2023)

by [Paulsen](#) — 1 week ago [🐦](#) [✉](#)



31 January 2004: CBS analyst Billy Packer interviews Illinois' men's head basketball coach Bruce Weber. Illinois defeated Michigan 67-52 at the Assembly Hall in Champaign, IL. Mandatory Credit: Mark Cowan/Icon SMI

**Billy Packer**, the longtime college basketball analyst who spent more than three decades calling the men's Final Four for NBC and later CBS, has died at age 82.

During his broadcasting career, Packer was as synonymous with college basketball on television as **Dick Vitale**. With NBC, he worked in arguably the most acclaimed broadcast booth in college basketball history alongside **Dick Enberg** and **Al McGuire**. He joined CBS when the network acquired rights to the men's tournament in 1982 and remained there until his 2008 retirement. (He, Enberg and McGuire briefly reunited at CBS to call one game prior to McGuire's death in 2001).

Overall, he worked the men's Final Four for 34-straight seasons — serving as a game analyst in 33 of those years and as the solo game analyst in the final 27 for CBS.

For much of his career, Packer was contrasted with the loquacious and energetic Vitale, whose star turn at ESPN coincided with Packer's lengthy run with CBS. While their styles — and occasionally their opinions — differed considerably, it is worth noting that both Packer and Vitale long maintained that any public perception of mutual dislike was incorrect. Packer told the *Tampa Bay Times* in 2005: "I don't know where this comes from. They try to say, 'These guys don't like each other.' I don't know how people can say that. We don't have any relationship. I've talked to you longer (in this interview) than I've ever talked to Dick Vitale in my life."

Between his ubiquity and his brusque, outspoken style, Packer accumulated many critics throughout his career. He and the late NBA commissioner David Stern feuded publicly for years, with Stern saying in 2008 that Packer had given the pro game the cold shoulder. It is worth noting that Packer did at one point in the 1980s call NBA games for CBS and while still with NBC advised the network to pick up NBA rights after it lost the NCAA Tournament in 1982. He told *Sports Broadcast Journal* in 2018 that NBC executive **Don Ohlmeyer's** dismissive reaction to that suggestion — physically tossing Packer's presentation — marked the end of his NBC career.

As evidenced by the prior example, Packer's ambitions extended beyond just calling games — and when he joined CBS his original plan was to focus on sales, marketing and expanding the network's relationship with the NCAA. He stayed in his on-air role at the request of CBS, but continued to provide business services to the network throughout his tenure. As the tournament grew and it became clear that CBS no longer needed him in that role, he retired.

Packer largely distanced himself from basketball in his retirement, citing the one-and-done era in the 2018 interview with *Sports Broadcast Journal*: "I can't tell you the name of one player on Kentucky. If I talked on-air about the state of the game today I would be fired." Per the publication, Packer said that since his 2008 retirement he had not attended a basketball game or watched one in full.

(Sports Broadcasting Journal [3.12.18](#), Tampa Bay Times [4.5.2005](#))

**tags:** college basketball broadcasters college basketball on cbs final four

## About Paulsen

---