

ESPN Bracketologist Joe Lunardi provides his expertise on 'What's Your Story?'

By **CHLOE GRANT**
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In a new episode of "What's Your Story?," Assistant Professor of Journalism and Program Director of Sports Communications Nick Pietruszkiewicz hosted ESPN Bracketologist Joe Lunardi to discuss how a hobby of predicting the NCAA men's basketball tournament field transformed into a year-round business and made him one of the faces of college basketball across all platforms.

The event was held in the Center for Communications, Computing and Engineering building's Open Air Studio on Thursday, March 5 and was open to all students and faculty.

It began with some light discussions on Lunardi's close relationship with Pietruszkiewicz and the excitement he feels in sharing his bracketeering expertise with Quinnipiac students.

First-year sports communications major Josh August shared a bit about his interest in hearing about Lunardi's experience as a professional bracketologist.

"I always can't wait for Selection Sunday," August said. "I print the bracket out Sunday night, usually start handwriting it.

ESPN is the best of the best, and he's obviously the top bracket guy there, so I value his insight."

The conversation delved into what the bracketeering process looks like, including the challenges that come along with the job and the potential for upset from fans as a result of his predictions.

Lunardi is not only well-versed in bracketology but also obtained a Bachelor's degree in marketing and communications at Saint Joseph's University. He later graduated from SJU in 1982 and went on to do freelance journalism for a period of time post-grad.

"Most of my PR colleagues in higher-ed and elsewhere, they're not used to having to turn around content that quickly," Lunardi said. "I'd be in meetings in my real job, and like, the president of the university would say, 'We need a policy statement about this or that' And I'm like, 'Yeah, (I'll) be back in an hour.' I'm not saying it's like brain surgery, but there is a skill to assemble information in a coherent way. I think sports made me a much better public relations professional than many of my peers."



RYLEY LEE/CHRONICLE

ESPN Bracketologist Joe Lunardi joins Assistant Professor of Journalism and Program Director of Sports Communications Nick Pietruszkiewicz for the latest installment of "What's Your Story?"

In detailing the story of how he got his start in bracketology, Lunardi describes the day ESPN launched a webpage solely for his content (pictures and graphics), and he began to wonder if he should pursue bracketology professionally.

"It got three quarters of a million hits in 45 minutes...I said, 'is that good?' Because, I mean, apparently the answer is yes, it is," Lunardi said. "But yeah, I thought maybe I should do this more formally."

Getting into the nitty-gritty of things, Lunardi went on to provide students with insight into a bracketologist's job, including how to go about creating spreadsheets and gathering information on data scraping. He emphasized the importance of staying updated with the latest results and changes in team standings.

He also touched on the significance of bracketology in the college basketball space and would go on to discuss various aspects of the two with the audience.

"I've always loved the sort of the word bracketology," first-year sports communications major Sam Kaplan said. "I think it's

cool that they've turned something that's so they've turned it into a science. I think it's really awesome how they can find all these stats and really get so close to 100% of all 68 of the teams."

Lunardi then shared his experience working alongside other media outlets while preaching the importance of making accurate projections as a bracketologist. This later led to a discussion on overcoming the challenges he has faced as a bracketologist while also embracing the rewarding aspects his career has brought him.

As the conversation began to wind down, Pietruszkiewicz opened the floor to students to ask any remaining questions.

After sharing some of his more memorable moments as a college basketball bracketologist and providing insight into the process of selecting teams and the factors that influence his bracketeering decisions, he concluded his time in the spotlight with a sentiment about staying humble in his role and expressing gratitude for the opportunities given to him.



RYLEY LEE/CHRONICLE

Lunardi's hobby of predicting the NCAA men's basketball tournament later turned into a year-round business.

The partnership includes a focus on keeping Quinnipiac alumni local

HAMDEN from cover

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dent Bethany Zemba from the President's Office — met for a kickoff meeting with a discussion focused on the aforementioned four major areas.

In updated economic impact figures, Quinnipiac noted more than \$1.4 billion in total economic activity. This includes \$187 million in employee spending, \$100 million in student spending and \$64 million in direct university purchasing.

"Both parties agreed to deepen collaboration with Dr. Gaius and the Economics Department to produce more regular demographic surveys and economic analyses that can better inform Town planning and devel-

opment strategy," according to the report.

Quinnipiac leaders highlighted ongoing but "under-recognized" contributions to the town in discussing community partnership and visibility. Those contributions included funding support for the new Police Activity League, participation in the annual spring cleanup and gardening initiative, and involvement in the Noble Gas project through a land-swap arrangement.

The discussion noted that the university is "heavily engaged" in Hamden's economic development, but the contributions have "lacked visibility and coordination with the town."

Over 25,000 Quinnipiac alumni currently live in Connecticut as highlighted in discussing talent retention and workforce alignment was addressed. The number liv-

ing specifically in Hamden is still under analysis however.

Quinnipiac is examining how to increase the number of graduates living and working locally.

This delved into a discussion on another "underutilized" program: "Their existing for-credit internship pipelines across the Business, Engineering, Communications and Medical Schools, which allow Hamden businesses to host students for project-based work."

In business development collaboration, the discussion included faculty support for "Concorp's small-business accelerator and opportunities to integrate university expertise into Town-led programs."

The final topic of the meeting surrounded student venture retention — focused on bar-

riers preventing young entrepreneurs from remaining in Hamden post graduation.

They noted that those barriers include housing affordability and availability which has been identified "as an impediment to retaining local talent." The committee notes a clear roadmap is necessary for achievement in the objective.

Moving forward, the committee will meet on a regular basis to "maintain momentum, address barriers collaboratively and ensure the partnership delivers measurable benefits for residents and the business community."

It is also a future initiative for the partnership to expand to other nearby schools including Yale University, Albertus Magnus College and Southern Connecticut State University.