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# Washington's Own Kenny Mayne Leaves Behind a Massive Legacy at ESPN

Ben Wiley, Author

After 27 years, SportsCenter anchor Kenny Mayne, one of the most well-respected and well-known sports media personalities, hosted his final ESPN show May 24. His decision to leave comes in the wake of ESPN's plan to cut his salary by more than half.

Mayne, a native of Kent, Wash., achieved immense success throughout his almost three decades at ESPN. After tirelessly working to convince ESPN to hire him, he ultimately developed legions of fans and supporters, both in and out of the sports world, who are impacted by his departure.

Mayne said that he knew back in the fourth or fifth grade that he wanted to work in communications. He initially was interested in covering local news and wanted to do documentaries. However, his passion quickly shifted once he entered the workforce.

"When I started working for the TV station KOMO 11 after college, I eventually moved up and got on the air. I wanted to do local news, yet they gave me the chance to do sports on weekends. I had played football growing up and in college and so sports became my passion. I approached ESPN, although it took a while to convince them. Finally I got hired and here we are 27 years later," Mayne said.

Mayne mentioned how fortunate he was to have experienced so many things and met so many people throughout his tenure as an ESPN personality. He declared the following experience as one that stood out from the rest.

"If I had to pick one, it was Stevie Wonder for a little piece of comedy. I got him to say 'I can't be at the All-Star Game. I have a high ankle sprain'... It kind of mirrors my career. Actually, you know, just shooting for the moon. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't," Mayne said.

Some other highlights include playing football with Snoop Dogg, covering live horse racing and football and filming the series Wider World of Sports in which he toured the world reporting on unique sports stories from places like Costa Rica and the Netherlands.

Throughout his career, Mayne has integrated his signature sense of humor into his shows and sports coverage. He has also produced and starred in many comedic commercials featuring athletes like Stephen Curry. For example, Steve Kelley, a retired Seattle Times sports columnist and good friend of Mayne, mentioned a comedic vignette Mayne created about cowboy rustlers coming to steal the Space Needle in the wake of the Seattle Sonics' move to become the Oklahoma City Thunder.



Along with his broadcasting work, Mayne and his wife Gretchen started the Run Freely foundation in 2018. Run Freely helps veterans dealing with catastrophic injuries run and walk freely again by raising money to help them pay for the ExoSym device and corresponding training course. Since 2017 when Mayne started wearing this device to help manage his arthritic knee pain resulting from a college football injury, he has lived pain free and now is able to help veterans reduce their pain through the foundation. In fact, Mayne noted that his announcement about leaving ESPN two weeks ago has already generated enough revenue to support two more veterans.

Mayne plans to end his ESPN career with a bang. For his last show May 24, he will welcome superstar athletes Aaron Rodgers, Marshawn Lynch and Sue Bird. Additionally, Mayne expressed interest in making more commercials, suggesting that he is not likely to slow down anytime soon. In fact, he already filmed a commercial for a new soda making company called OLIPOP. However, Mayne does not have a set plan in place for his future at the moment.

"It sounds like I will have a place to land to some degree. I don't see replacing it like going somewhere else where I am working five days a week. I think it's going to be more like here's a project here, here's a project there, maybe I have a longer relationship with one more than another. I am just kind of guessing now. It's too early to say," Mayne said.

Kelley is excited to see where Mayne ends up, especially because he thinks that ESPN never truly valued Mayne's unique abilities.

"I think that ESPN knew that he was good, yet they didn't know what to do with him as he was different and clever...I think that they thought that viewers wouldn't like him, but the truth is that viewers loved him because he was different... Kenny has a gigantic audience and I think they are going to regret losing him," Kelley said.

Indeed, Mayne exemplifies the importance of being authentic and staying true to yourself in whatever you do and then hopefully someone will hire you for your talents. This certainly worked out for Mayne who portrayed his authentic self on ESPN for 27 years.

"Everyone is really curious about where he lands as it will probably be something that we never predicted, but I don't know where it's going to be," Kelley said.

While one chapter of Mayne's life is closing, another chapter is only just beginning.