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# 50 seasons with the New Orleans Saints: From their perch in the control booth, Romigs have seen it all

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There has been a member of the Romig family in the house control booth for 50 years, starting with his father, Jerry Romig, in 1969. Mark Romig took over Jerry Romig as announcer in 2013; Mary Beth Romig has been an offense spotter for about 26 years; and Jay Romig, New Orleans Saints Administrative Director, who has been with the Saints organization for more than 40 years.

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Advocate staff photo by Jeff Strout

“TOUCCCCHDOOWWNN SAAINTS!”

The triumphant cry resounded through the cavernous Mercedes-Benz Superdome, and the crowd answered with cheers that almost drowned it out.

The man behind the microphone, Mark Romig, is part of a family, starting with his late father, Jerry Romig, that has been entwined with New Orleans Saints history for 50 football seasons this year.

And while the game against the Carolina Panthers on Dec. 30 wasn't memorable — the Saints lost — the crew of nine in the house control booth, aka the Jerry Romig Suite — were unwavering in their attention.

They have to be — or they'll hear from fans in the suites and seats surrounding them.

The Romig family got involved in 1969, when the team, then owned by John Mecom, was in its third season and played in the old Tulane Stadium.

The Saints asked Jerry Romig, a former newspaper sports reporter who worked at WDSU-TV, to announce the games. He was

already announcing Tulane University football games, so it was a natural fit.

Romig also called Sugar Bowl games and, until the NFL hired its own team, four Super Bowls, along with season after season of Saints home games. He died in 2015, but when his son, Mark, took over the microphone, the family was well prepared.

Romig often brought his kids to the games, and a couple of them started working for the Saints early on.

“I remember my dad taking me up and down on those rickety aluminum stairs to the little bitty booth,” said Mary Beth Romig, recalling the work space at the old Tulane Stadium.

Mary Beth is now public relations director at LCMC Health. But on Saints home game days, armed with a pair of binoculars, she serves as a spotter, supplying the announcer with information about the team's offensive plays and calling out the names of players.

She has years of experience. “My father drafted me in 1992,” she said.

There's another Romig in the booth as well: Jay, who has worked for the Saints for 42 years.

Jay Romig has manned the scoreboard for 20 years, after doing some spotter work for his dad. Jay's biggest fear is putting up the score for the wrong team. It has happened once or twice, he admitted. (Helping him not make a mistake is Aaron Alterman.)

Jay started as a student trainer in high school, and he's now the team's administrative director, or "Vice President of Everything," which was a title coined by Tom Benson that's still used by team owner Gayle Benson.

Co-workers who feel like family include Tony Melito, who spots for the defense, and the Saints' director of game day entertainment, Kyle Campbell.

The biggest change in the booth came in pre-season 2013, when Mark Romig took over from his father. When he retired at 86, Jerry Romig had announced 446 consecutive home games.

Romig was known as the "Voice of the Saints," and was famous for the way he boomed the phrase "First Down Saints!" It sounded more

like “FIRSSST DOWWN SAIINTS,” a tradition that Mark Romig has carried on — adding his own flourish, “Move Dem Chains!”

Mark remembers fondly that when he started, his father told him, “Sound like yourself. Don’t worry about me.”

“Jerry Romig was an iconic figure and voice in New Orleans. As the voice of the Superdome, he captured many great moments for decades,” said Dennis Lauscha, president of the New Orleans Saints and Pelicans. “We consider his family part of the Saints family. And so having Mark replace his father in that seat at the Superdome was an easy decision, and we could not be prouder of our association with the Romig family.”

Mark Romig, whose day job is president and CEO of New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corp., gets to the games at least four hours before kickoff to prep, with the crew arriving not long after.

Other members of the house control booth include Kyle Curley, music director; Norman Bennett Jr., SMG sound man; and Chuck Edwards, the stadium’s game day host emcee,

who makes the introductions as well as any announcements for pregame, TV timeouts and promotional entertainment. He is also the voice of the New Orleans Pelicans.

For the Panthers game, the crew worked from an 18-page script, using an oversized card with both teams' players and numbers on it.

And while the Romigs and their booth crew have an easy camaraderie, there have been a few mistakes — and some sibling teasing.

“When Dwayne Washington first joined the Saints, he made a play and I referred to him as ‘Kerry Washington,’ the actress from ‘Scandal,’” said Mary Beth. The mistake was quickly rectified, but, she said, “The whole ride home, Mark wouldn’t let me forget it.”

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