Boxing fans know David Diamante as a guy with dreadlocks that reach below his waist and as one of the best ring announcers in the business. The sweet science is his first love. But recently, it has been his secondary gig.

Since the start of the 2011-2012 NBA season, Diamante has been the in-arena voice of the New Jersey Nets.

Last fall, David read an article about the Nets holding auditions for a new PA announcer. He

applied for the position, went through a rigorous audition process, and got the job. Then, like everyone else, he waited through a contract dispute between the owners and players that delayed the start of the NBA season until December 25th.

“It was tough sitting out the lockout,” David says, “although I’m sure it was tougher for the players and a lot of other people associated with the Nets. It was a great Christmas present for me when everything was settled and the games started. I’m passionate about sports. Boxing is my favorite; I want to announce fights forever. But I love basketball and I love doing this. I’ve got a multi-year contract with the Nets, which means I can put all of my energy and emotion into doing the job right rather than worrying about whether or not I’ll he hired to work the next fight.”

This season has tested the loyalty of Nets fans. Brook Lopez (the team’s elite center) has been sidelined with a foot injury. Point guard Deron Williams is the squad’s best player, but power forward Kris Humphries is the most famous by virtue of his ill-fated marriage to Kim Kardashian. The Nets didn’t win at home until their fifteen game; a 107-100 triumph over Golden State on January 18th. And it’s a matter of record that the team will move across the Hudson River to the Barclays Center in Brooklyn after the 2011-2012 season.

Diamante is responsible for creating an air of optimism in the here and now at the Prudential Center in Newark (where the Nets play their home games).

“I felt comfortable in the job from the start,” David says. “That’s partly because I’m backed by good people who give me great support. And some of the jobs I had before this, like working in clubs where anything can happen, means that the unexpected never shakes me.”

“And I love the job,” Diamante continues. “I’m a boxing guy. When you’re boxing and someone hits you in the nose and you feel the bone crunch and you taste your own blood, you can’t call ‘time out’. Basketball is a game. People die in boxing. But there’s a lot of physical contact in basketball. These guys are big; these guys are strong; and there are times when they beat each other up. Taking a charge in the NBA is like getting punched in the body by a heavyweight. And when a basketball player falls, it’s on a hard wood court, not a ring canvas. The best basketball players have the same killer instinct that fighters have. They’ll pay any price to win. And seeing them up close, you realize what amazing athletes they are. You can’t really see how good they are on television. But to sit at the edge of the court and watch them whiz by on a fast break; for men that big to move that fast with such agility is extraordinary. And it’s beautiful to see them work together as a team.”

On Sunday, January 29th, Diamante arrived at the Prudential Center at 4:00 PM. Wearing a navy-blue suit, striped shirt, and conservative tie, he moved easily through the back passageways of the arena, offering a warm hello to everyone he passed.

The Nets would be playing the Toronto Raptors. Game time was 6:05 PM. New Jersey had a 7-and-13 record, but was coming into the contest on a two-game winning streak. The Raptors sported a 6-and-14 ledger and were without their leading scorer (7-foot center Andrea Bargnani).

Diamante does his homework assiduously. He watches all of the Nets away games on television and researches upcoming opponents on the Internet. He's constantly running inventive phrases through his mind. A three-point field goal for Deron Williams becomes a "three-Will" for D-Will. Alone at home, he rehearses his calls again and again to see how they sound and feel.

In the press room, David picked up a media packet and began highlighting names with a yellow marker.

The Nets have four players whose surname is Williams: Deron Williams, Sheldon Williams, Jordan Williams, and Shawne Williams.

"If I miss a play," Diamante noted, "I can call 'Williams' and have a pretty good chance of getting it right."

When his review was done, David ate a light dinner (there was a buffet for staff and working press). At 5:15, he entered the arena and took his place at a long table midway between the Nets and Raptors benches.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he intoned, "welcome to the Prudential Center, home of Nets basketball."

Over the next half-hour, Diamante offered a stream of information to those in attendance. He thanked various Nets sponsors; talked about ticket packages for upcoming games; warned against smoking in the arena, and welcomed a group of students from the Willard School in Ridgewood, New Jersey. In due course, he was joined at the table by the timekeeper, head scorer, and announcers for the YES television network.

At 5:47, the Raptors took the floor to warm up . . . “Ladies and gentlemen; please welcome tonight’s opponent, the Toronto Raptors.”

The Nets followed a minute later . . . “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome your NEW . . . JERSEY . . . NETS !!!!!”

“In boxing,” Diamante notes, “I’m expected to be impartial. Here, it’s part of my job to be a Nets fan. I’m always respectful toward the other team. But when one of our guys scores, I don’t just say it; I sing it.”

At 6:05, Diamante introduced the Raptors starting line-up. Then --

Lights out . . . Spotlights . . . Pulsating music . . .

“The starting line-up for your NEW . . . JERSEY . . . NETS !!!!!”

And finally, Diamante’s signature line, modified for basketball.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen; from the four corners of the world to the four corners of this court, *the game starts now*.”

Tip-off . . . The Nets controlled the ball.

“Being the PA announcer for an NBA team requires a different skill set from ring announcing,” Diamante explains. “In boxing, there are times when I’m in the center of the ring reading the decision after a close fight and millions of people are hanging on my every word. Here, the focus is never on me. I’m heard but not seen. And unlike ring announcing, where I’m only on at the beginning and end of a fight, I’m calling the entire game for the crowd. There’s no downtime, no time to daydream. I have to pay close attention every second of the game.”

As the game progressed, Diamante catalogued the action, calling out the name of each player who scored and more.

“Traveling . . . Time out, Nets . . . Checking in for Toronto, number eleven . . . Please welcome the Nets dancers . . .”

At the end of the first quarter, the score was tied at 24. Toronto had a 44-39 lead at the half. A 10-2 spurt put the Raptors up by 13 points early in the third stanza. The Nets trailed by 17 at the three-quarter mark. With 7:24 left in the game and the Raptors ahead 82-to-62, the crowd began filing out.

At 8:15 PM, it was over. The Nets had lost a game that, on paper, they should have won. Final score: Raptors 94 Nets 73.

Diamante announced that Deron Williams was high scorer for the Nets with 24 points; then closed with, “Thank you for coming. And please, arrive home safely.”

Boxing fans should be pleased. Another one of our own has made it to the bigtime.

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) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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