

GEORGE BEAHON: 1920-2006

Sportswriting loses an icon in Beahon

■ Popular Rochester columnist, television personality dies at 86.

BOB MATTHEWS
STAFF WRITER

George Beahon, a legendary sports reporter and columnist for the Gannett Rochester Newspapers and a popular TV sports caster who made the phrase "that's as far as I go" famous, died Monday morning in his sleep. He was 86. "George was as big as it gets in local sportswriting," *Democrat and Chronicle* sports editor Tom Batzold said. "He covered it all." "We thought the world

of George," said Dan Guilfoyle, a longtime friend and fellow member of the Rochester Press-Radio Club. "He said and wrote exactly what he felt." Mr. Beahon interviewed many of the nation's top sports stars, including Babe Ruth, and covered virtually every major sporting event — including 20 World Series. His favorite interviews included Carmen Basilio ("more guts than ability"), Jack Nicklaus ("nothing

but class") and Joe Namath ("pure excitement"). He called Leo Durocher "the unfriendliest guy I've met." Mr. Beahon's first job was in an electronics shop in 1940. When a co-worker refused to tune in to the World Series on the radio, George quit. He began his full-time professional journalism career covering high school sports for the *Democrat and Chronicle* late in 1941. He enlisted in the Navy in 1942, served in intelligence and returned to the newspaper after World War II. Mr. Beahon covered a variety of major sporting

events from 1946 through 1969, when he left after a disagreement with management. He then worked as publicist for Finger Lakes Race Track. "I had to leave after two years. I was visiting my money," he said of the race-track job. "I got paid there and left it there (betting on the horses)." He later became a TV sportscaster for Channel 13 and Channel 8 before returning to print journalism part-time with the *Times-Union* in 1979. He retired in 1984. Mr. Beahon, widely regarded as a "major-league

Legacy George Beahon won't be forgotten, **6D**

talent in a small-market town," rejected many job offers from newspapers in major cities because he was a family man and Rochester was his hometown. He was inducted into the Red Wings Hall of Fame in 1990 and is a charter member of the Frontier Field Walk of Fame. He also is in the Section V basketball and football Halls of Fame. The Rochester Press-Radio

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File photo 1966
Former sportswriter George Beahon interviewed many of the nation's top sports stars, including Babe Ruth.

Beahon

FROM PAGE 1D

Club and Rochester Boxing Hall of Fame sportswriter of the year awards are named in his honor.

Before he became a columnist in 1959, Mr. Beahon's top beats included the Red Wings, the NBA champion Rochester Royals (all games home and away) and the football glory years of Aquinas Institute in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He also was a nationally respected boxing writer.

"We've lost an icon," Rochester Boxing Hall of Fame president Tony Liccione said. "George covered lots of big fights and really knew the sport."

Memorable moments

Mr. Beahon, who missed the births of three of his four children while on assignment, said his "most exciting" sportswriting experience was covering the Red Wings during the Cuban revolution.

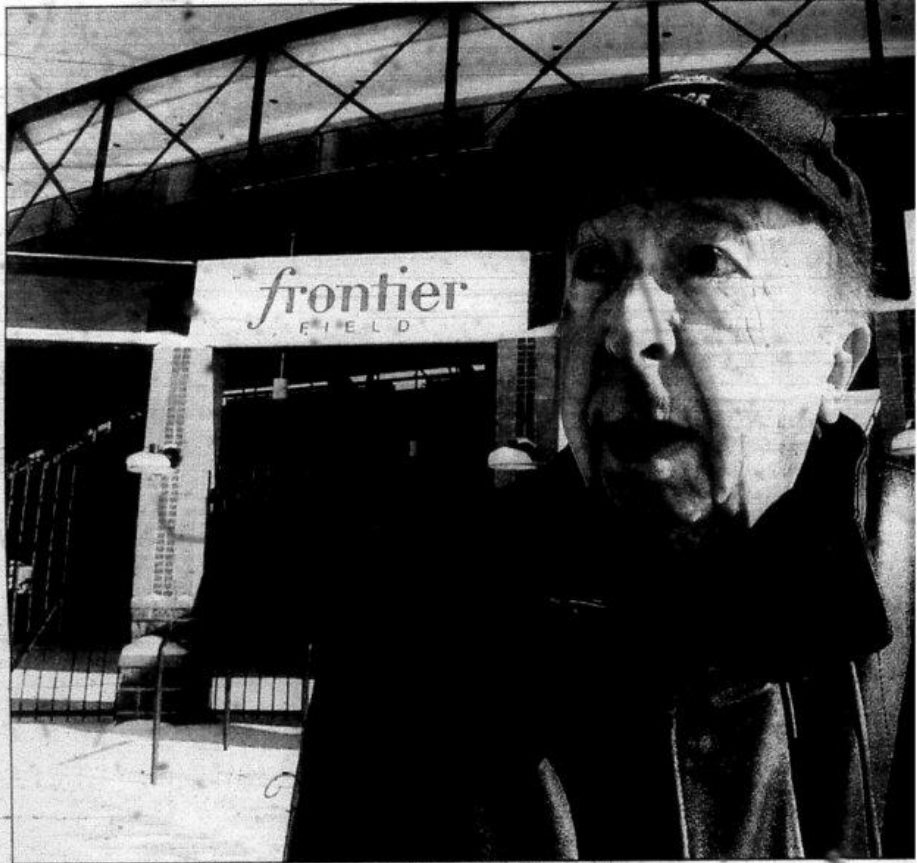
During a game in Havana in the summer of 1960, Red Wings third baseman Frank Verdi was struck in the helmet liner by a soldier's stray bullet.

"That was scary," Mr. Beahon recalled. "But it was even scarier when Castro rolled into town. On the morning of a scheduled Sunday afternoon game, two huge oil tanks were blown up near the stadium. We hustled to the airport, where a lot of rich Cubans were trying to bail out. We just managed to catch a flight to Miami."

"George was a legend in the International League from his years covering the Red Wings beat home and away," Rochester Community Baseball general manager Dan Mason said. "It was a different era. Reporters traveled with the team and really got to know the managers and players."

"George was a terrific beat writer and then a columnist," Rochester's "Mr. Baseball," Joe Altobelli, said Monday. "He was an honest writer and always to the point. The players and managers liked and respected him."

His daily "In This Corner" column, featuring "Hopscotching the Sports Beat" notes, was a



Longtime sports columnist George Beahon takes in a game at Frontier Field. He was inducted into the and is a charter member of the Frontier Field Walk of Fame. He also is in the Section V basketball and

can't-miss mix of information and opinions that entertained many thousands of Rochester sports readers every morning for a decade.

Objective observer

In his columns and TV commentaries, Mr. Beahon never ducked controversy.

"If you're all gee-whiz and cheerleading for the home team, I think you lose your readers and viewers," he once said. "I don't look for controversy, but I am not going to back off from it. It's the bloodline of editorials. If I didn't have a skin against criticism, I'd be long gone. Once I started to write a column, I had to develop that shell."

Some fans considered Mr. Beahon to be the "Howard Cosell of Rochester."

"I don't object, because I have a high respect for Cosell," he quipped, "and I'd like to have

about one-tenth of his money."

One of Mr. Beahon's most famous incidents was when he and the newspaper were sued for \$50,000 each for libel by a man who won a \$51,000 Twin Double at Finger Lakes and then tried to get into the track to cash his ticket the next day without paying the \$2 admission. Mr. Beahon called the man a "cheapskate." He recalled years later, "We went to court and the judge agreed that the guy was a cheapskate. He threw the case out on the third day."

On the air

Mr. Beahon began his TV career in 1973 when Channel 13 offered him the sports director job. The offer came as a surprise, he said.

"I thought you had to have appearance, looks and a voice to be on TV," he said. "What more could I possibly miss?"

He said he was so nervous in the early going that his stomach began churning at about 5 p.m. for his 6:20 p.m. show. His tag line, "That's as far as I go," began one night in his first week when he couldn't think of any other way to sign off.

Management loved it, and so did the audience. His charisma and crisp commentaries made him the top sportscaster in town until Rich Funke arrived as Channel 10's sports director and anchor in 1977.

"I always watched George on Channel 13, and I loved his commentaries," recalled Funke, now a news anchor at Channel 10. "On my first night on air, I couldn't think of how to sign off and said, 'And that's as far as I go.' George phoned me and good-naturedly said that was his line. But that's how much I respected him."

"It was a pleasure watching



File photo 1999

Red Wings Hall of Fame in 1990
football Halls of Fame.

games with George through the years and listening to his stories about Babe Ruth, and the Royals, and Les Harrison. Things we read about, he lived.

"And he was so knowledgeable during the assorted sports Hall of Fame selection committee meetings we attended. It was always great to see him attending sporting events into his 80s, for the sheer love of it."

When Channel 13 terminated Mr. Beahon, the public rallied to his support and he received several offers from other media outlets. He chose Channel 8, but only under the condition that he not replace incumbent sports anchor Don Fischer. He wanted to work as part of a team, and that's what happened for the next two years.

Return to writing

After Mr. Beahon was fired by Channel 8 in September 1979,

Bob on Beahon

Bob Matthews recalls George Beahon:

"I grew up reading George Beahon's columns in this newspaper. My career goal since I was in the sixth grade was to follow in his footsteps. I was extremely fortunate to see my dream come true with George as a special friend and mentor. I take some solace in his passing by knowing that he led a long and exciting life, doing exactly what he wanted on his own terms, and will be missed by many loving relatives and friends who admired and respected him."

Times-Union sports editor Frank Cardon wasted no time in adding Mr. Beahon to his staff as a part-timer. His weekly "What's Your Beef?" column quickly became a popular feature.

"I had a few other jobs, but I've always been a newspaperman at heart," he said when he retired in 1984. Mr. Beahon and toastmaster extraordinaire Jerry Flynn were close friends for more than 50 years, until Mr. Flynn died in January 2004.

"They played tricks on each other for all those years," said Kevin Flynn, Jerry's son. "George was like a member of our family. My dad will have some good company soon."

In recent years, Mr. Beahon enjoyed watching his great-grandson Kane play in the Pittsford Little League and was a Sunday night regular at Milestones Restaurant and Music Room on East Avenue to hear Irish music.

"He had a heart attack a while ago and spent a few days in the hospital," granddaughter Andrea Thompson said. "They wanted him to stay a little longer, but he said to skip the paperwork because had to get to Kane's game."

George, his daughter Lauri and two granddaughters were at Milestones Sunday night to hear the Dady Brothers.

"He was a great guy, and we always enjoyed seeing him," said Heather Gillen, Milestones manager. "It will be a sad Sunday this week. We're going to miss him."

Several generations of Rochester sports fans will, too. □