

GEORGE BEAHON: 1920-2006

Region forever blessed because big-league talent stayed home

One of my favorite George Beahon stories involves his first writing assignment for the *Democrat and Chronicle* back in 1941.

After months of grunt work filling glue pots and taking box scores over the phone as a copy boy, George was dispatched to the old ballpark on 500 Norton St. to interview the one and only Babe Ruth, who was in town for a hitting exhibition.

"I go into the locker room where Babe's dressing, and I'm so young-looking at the time he thinks I'm a gofer," Beahon told me a few years back. "So he hands me \$10 and says, 'Hey, kid, get me a couple of hot dogs and a beer.' I go to the concessionaire, Bill O'Connor, and say, 'Babe Ruth wants some hot dogs and beer,' and Bill says, 'Tell him to keep the money. It's on the house.'

"I bring the Babe his stuff, and he tells me to keep the \$10. Before I could put the bill in my wallet, the Babe had finished the hot dogs and the beer. I had heard he had a hell of an appe-



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tite, but that was amazing."

The 21-year-old Beahon came away from the ballpark with a \$10 bill and a priceless story.

For the next half-century, he entertained with insightful — and occasionally in-cite-ful — columns that became must-reads and made him every bit as big as the players and coaches he covered.

George died Monday at age 86, but his memory will live on in the people who read him and in the writers, like yours truly, who feebly attempt to follow in his keyboard strokes.

I didn't stumble onto George's writing until I moved here in 1985. By that time, he was down to a once-a-week

column for the old *Times-Union*. Those missives whetted my appetite, but it wasn't until I came across his work during microfilm research that I began to appreciate just how good and prolific he was.

There's no doubt in my mind that George was a big-league talent in a Triple-A town. He stayed here not because he couldn't work in the Big Apple or L.A., but rather because he didn't want to leave his hometown.

It was a privilege to meet George and get to know him. At various times, he would send me typed or handwritten notes with words of encouragement. Those letters meant the world to me. I still have them.

Whenever I saw him at an event, I would go up to him to chat. I loved listening to his stories about great and not-so-great moments in Rochester sports history.

"Some of these stories," he quipped, "are actually true."

He was passionate about Aquinas Institute, Notre Dame

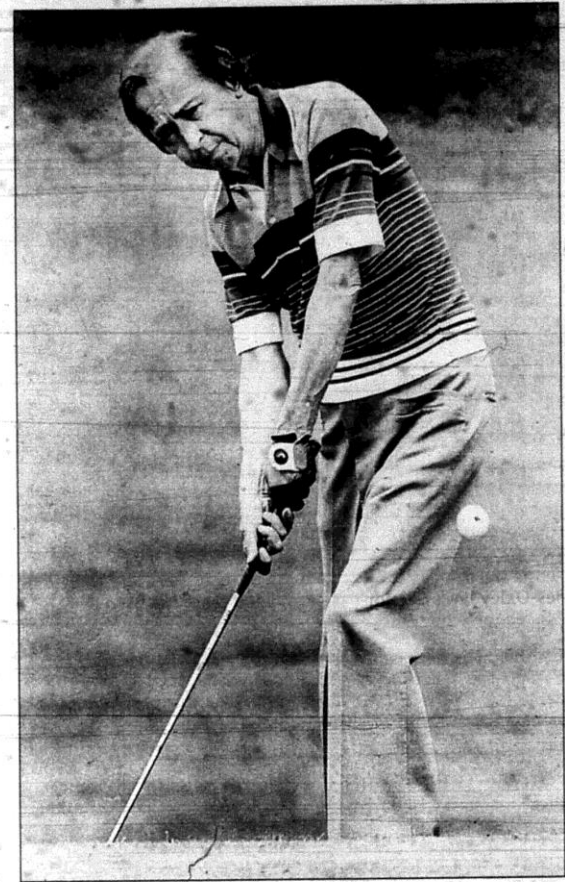
football, horse racing, boxing and baseball — particularly the Red Wings. He played a pivotal role in the community stock drive to save baseball here 50 years ago.

He also was one of the founders of the Rochester Press-Radio Club, which has raised more than \$2 million for local charities.

I arrived in Rah-Cha-Cha after he finished his brief but memorable sportscasting career. I'm told he violated every broadcasting tenet and had a face for radio, but people loved him anyway because he was sincere and always made sure the most interesting stories aired.

He ended each sportscast with his signature phrase: "That's as far as I go."

But death isn't as far as George goes. He will live on in the readers he entertained, informed and swayed, and in the sportswriters he influenced. He was a true giant of my profession and a friend, and he will be greatly missed. □



File photo

Longtime Rochester sports journalist George Beahon loved the game of golf. Here he plays Oak Hill Country Club in 1980.