

'Some day there would be another DiMaggio'

Once upon a time, my folks took to me to see an old wise man speak. I say "old" and "wise" because these were the traits most evident to me at the age of eight, or thereabouts. This is one of my oldest memories, treasured tenderly ever since I was old enough to realize who the old man was. The sage spoke about the glory of sport and captivated my imagination at an age when I should have been outside in the summer sun playing baseball rather than inside a stuffy library listening to someone talk about it. But Walter W. "Red" Smith was just that special.

Red and I shared a town in Connecticut. I began typing my first byline there, while Red was chiseling his final columns that now stand as the Parthenon of sports journalism. While I agonized over whether to trade away my prize frog for a glorious Tom Seaver baseball card, Red sat in his office in a barn across town painting prosaic portraits of Tom Terrific.

I envy Red. Not only because he is arguably the best ever at what I like to do best, but because he was lucky enough to chronicle what I consider to be the golden age of sport. Red philosophized and preached about everyone from Joe Louis to Joe Namath, Babe Ruth to Babe Didrikson-Zaharias, legendary fisherman Levi Jackson to Reggie Jackson and Secretariat to name just a few.

Perhaps Red's most cherished assignment though, was the Olympics. He called it the "quadrennial muscle dance" for both athletic and later political reasons. In fact, the Olympics epitomizes Red's transcendence of the best of times in sport. His first Games were in London in 1948. Red was amused by the drama of the opening ceremonies. He called it "hokum" and "... pure Hollywood. But it was good. You had to like it," Red said. By 1980, Red's last Olympics, he was writing about wars, not games, and supporting

Tim Crothers Thank You Notes

the boycott. "In ancient Greece, wars were suspended when the Olympics rolled around," he wrote. "It says here the Olympics should be suspended when the caissons roll."

Red's Olympia typewriter was finally silenced in our town on Jan. 15, 1982. Coincidentally, I had arrived at UNC only five days earlier with his torch firmly in hand. Ironically, the first sports article I ever wrote for The Daily Tar Heel was a behind-the-scenes column on the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. I chose to write about the original spirit of the Olympics. In my column, I told a story about a Moroccan skier who finished last in the downhill and was asked after the event if he was disappointed. "Heck no, I'm just glad to be here," he said. "That's what the Greeks had in mind." I wrote in tribute. I think Red would have been proud. Between the two of us we haven't missed a "muscle dance" in 36 years.

What I admire most about Red is his perspective on sports and sports-writing. "I've always tried to remember that sports isn't Armageddon. These are just little games that little boys can play, and it really isn't important to the future of civilization whether the Athletics or the Browns win," Red wrote, in 1973. "If you can accept it as entertainment and write it as entertainment, then I think that what spectator sports are meant to be."

About his craft, Red was characteristically understated. "I feel keeping the public informed is a perfectly worthwhile way to spend your life. I think sports constitute a valid part of our culture, our civilization, and keeping the



The sage, Red Smith, sculpting a column in his barn in our town

public informed and, if possible, a little entertained about sports is not an entirely useless thing." These views are like gospel to me. No further comment is necessary.

In Red's final column, written only days before his death, he mentioned a question he was often asked. "Of all the athletes you have met, which one did you like the best?" Red responded in his distinctly cordial voice in the last line of the column. "Some day there would be another Joe DiMaggio," he said.

In my final column, I want to say that there will never be another Red Smith, but don't worry Red, I'll keep our torch afire.

... ..

P.S. — I want to thank the Academy, my dog that died two years ago and those people, you know who you are, who deserve my appreciation. I love all of you. Fraternaly, of course.

See ya,
Mom

Siskel and Ebert on UNC athletic seasons

Scott Fowler The Far Sideline

GENE: Hi, I'm Gene Siskel, film critic of the Chicago Sun Times. And across the aisle from me is that rotund, renowned reviewer, Roger Ebert, film critic of the Chicago Tribune. Today, on a special edition of our show, we're going to review three UNC athletic seasons. So settle back and enjoy as we pick the best and the worst from the Tar Heels on *At the Movies*.

ROGER: We'll start with the UNC football season. This year the team went 5-6, including a season-ending loss at home to Duke. Here's a film clip of an early-season, 31-0 loss to Georgia Tech.

Kevin Anthony calls timeout, goes and confers with Coach Dick Crum, comes back on the field, fades back to pass and is immediately mauled by four defensive linemen.

GENE: What I felt that this film lacked is direction. The part of Kevin Anthony was indistinct. I did enjoy Tommy Barnhardt's punts, which came very frequently, but I think it says something about this team that its most valuable player was a punter.

ROGER: I agree with you entirely. The defense was noticeably improved since the James brothers left and took with them their technique of fronting the receiver on deep passes. But where was Arnold Franklin anyway? I saw him on the cover of The Daily Tar Heel football tab, and then he just faded away. I think we can both agree on this one.

ROGER AND GENE IN UNISON: Thumbs down!

ROGER: Our next season to be reviewed is the UNC basketball team, which started the season 21-0 and was ranked No. 1 for 13 consecutive weeks, but lost in the Final 16 for the second straight year to the defending champion, Louisville. Here's a clip.

Brad Daugherty drives the lane and smashes a thunderdunk into a Utah Ute face. Fade to black, and then Billy Thompson and Pervis Ellison hit innumerable jumpers as UNC tries in vain to defend.

GENE: Well, in an odd sort of way, I disliked the likeability of this picture. The beginning really got to me, the way they romped over everyone. And then the Marquette game...

ROGER (interrupting): But don't you think the beginning was overshadowed by the disappointing end,

where the senior class becomes the first one not to make a Final Four?

GENE: No, I think that's part of its existential beauty. I believe this season is conveying the message: So what if you have an exemplary program and the best coach in America? All your hopes can still go down in flames of a freshman with braces. But still, since I love to be disagreeable, THUMBS DOWN.

ROGER: I thought that several performances that looked awfully good in the first part of the picture slumped miserably toward the end. And where did Kevin Madden go? This picture was just too uneven for me, like when I try to eat a piece of cheesecake while someone is shaking my chair. I also say THUMBS DOWN.

GENE: For our third and last film, we always like to pick a French film with subtitles that you've never heard of so that we can impress you with our intellectual dry wit and ability to pronounce words like "magnifique." However, since we have no French teams at UNC, we thought we'd review a little-known club sport called "Jumping on Overcooked Pancakes with your Middle Toes And Eating the Remains, Ruminatively." Let's take a look.

Film clip shows a couple of old men on Franklin street wearing berets and jumping on a white, gooey mass. They then ease down to pick up a chunk of it and chew. It appears they may be ruminating.

ROGER: I went back and saw this picture four times, and each time we came to that scene I began sobbing uncontrollably until I had to be forcibly removed by three ushers. So I never did see the end, but nevertheless I absolutely loved it.

GENE: I couldn't agree with you more. I would say these are Oscar-winning performances by these two unknown actors. Absolutely magnifique! And that concludes this week's episode of *At the Movies*. Tune in next week when we'll review three UNC coaching performances. Until then, we'll see you on *At the Movies*.

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