

Bob Hersom was ace reporter, mentor, friend

Written by Mark Dukes

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The Metro Sports Report would have been right in Bob Hersom's wheelhouse. This website is devoted to Metro high school sports, as was Bob several years ago.

Hersom died last week at the age of 64 of non-alcoholic cirrhosis while he waited for a liver transplant ([obit from the Oklahoman](#)). He had left Cedar Rapids in 1980 to start what would become a remarkable newspaper career in Oklahoma.

He retired in 2008, earning two Oklahoma Sportswriter of the Year awards. He covered Oklahoma football for years and, as a respect for Bob's work, former coach Barry Switzer was at the memorial service.

Hersom was one of my colleagues at The Gazette in the 1970s. We both covered high school sports at a time when newspapers used to devote a whole lot more space to them. Bob, 10 years my senior, quickly became a mentor as a reporter.

Hersom covered a lot of football and basketball in the Metro area. Longtime coaches such as Don King at Washington and Bob Thurness of Marion will tell you his stories were accurate and fair to both sides.

Preparation was one of Bob's strengths as a reporter. He did as much work researching a game as he did covering it.

I recall that before each game, Bob would assemble at least one legal-size page of notes that included starting lineups, heights, weights, scoring averages, and the like. He would also research trends of players and teams, and interview coaches days before the game. He wanted to be prepared for anything that happened in the game.

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Maybe it was because Bob was a local himself and he knew how much the games meant to the schools and the players. He grew up across from Franklin Junior High and graduated from Washington.

He told me more than once there were more great athletes in his neighborhood than anywhere in town in the 1960s. Maybe, too, it was somewhat of a journalistic competition with his brother, Terry, who would become a fine reporter and editor with the Sioux City Journal.

Hersom also covered plenty of minor-league baseball and may be best remembered for his coverage in 1976 when the Cedar Rapids ballclub was affiliated with the San Francisco Giants. Under manager Salty Parker, the Giants went on to a memorable run that led to a 78-53 record and a berth in the Midwest League playoffs. Hersom dubbed the team "The Miracle on Rockford Road."

Bob's family and mine became pretty close when he was in Cedar Rapids but, like so many relationships, our contact with one another regrettably became less and less over the years. But I still followed him as he covered Oklahoma football, the Oklahoma City Thunder, and minor-league baseball and hockey.

There have been many terrific sportswriters in Cedar Rapids over the years, so many that I would hate to rank them. But Bob Hersom would be squarely in the discussion.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Mark Dukes was sports editor of the Cedar Rapids Gazette from 1984 to 1999.)