



Vince and Lou come alive again as WGN honors them with Rosenberg on Walk of Fame

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
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Jack Rosenberg knew the significance of the WGN Walk of Fame ceremony on May 25 in Pioneer Court outside Tribune Tower.

“We were all brothers,” Rosey said, his normally gravelly Pekin-ese downstate voice tuned down to half wattage due to a throat ailment. The longtime WGN sports editor, now 91, was being inducted along with late comrades-in-arms Vince Lloyd and Lou Boudreau into the WGN Walk of Fame. And he was as happy for Lloyd and Boudreau as he was for himself.



Nearly a half century after their WGN-Radio prime, the late Lou Boudreau and Vince Lloyd got their just due from their old station.

Why shouldn't that WGN sports crew be siblings in all but genetic connections? They probably spent as much time at the ballparks and studios with each other as their families. And they did it for decades on end. Once you got a job at the most famous radio-TV combination in Chicago, if not the entire country, you'd have to go a long way to goof it up. You retired from WGN, with hundreds of thousands of listeners forever remembering you.

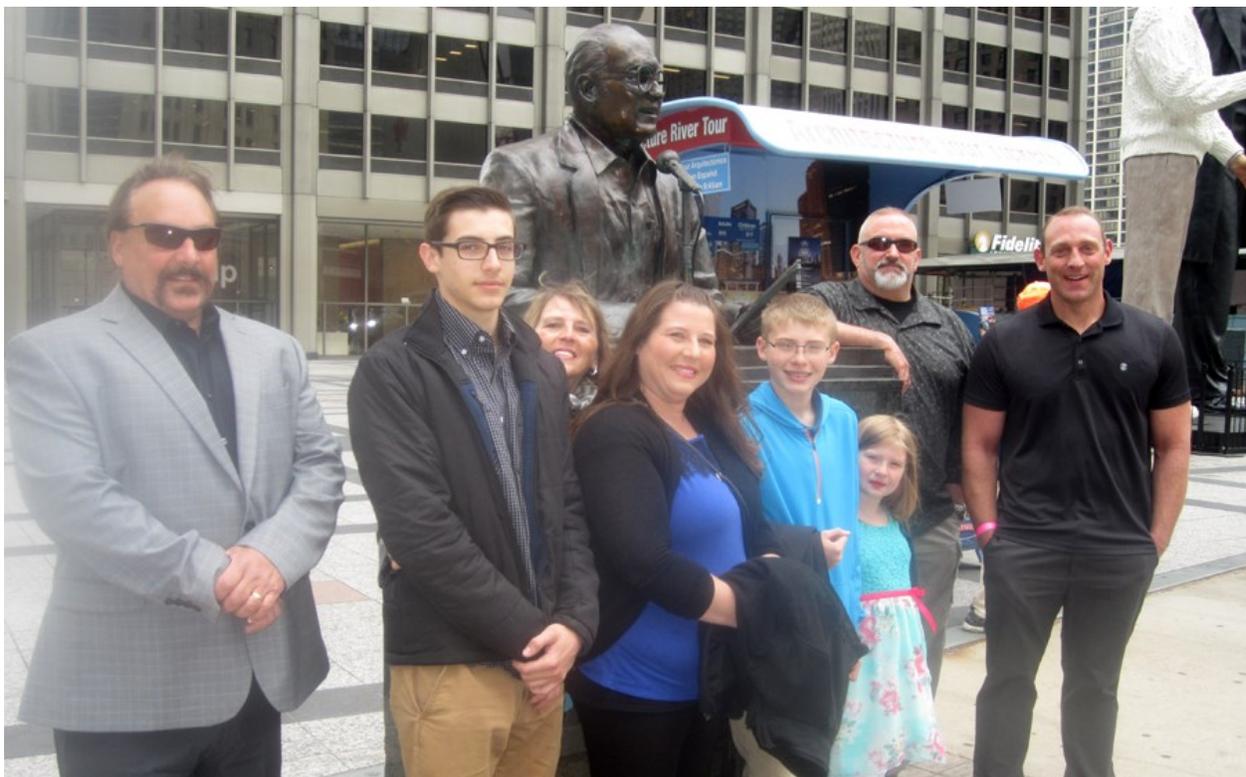
That's why the Walk of Fame induction was so important. WGN's giants like Jack Brickhouse, Wally Phillips and Bob Collins were ushered in early in the Walk of Fame's history. But the station took a little while to get around to waving in staples like Lloyd and Boudreau, its best-remembered baseball radio team, and Rosenberg, the organizer-arranger-writer whose manual typewriter's clattering were Baby Boomers' soundtrack of summer in Brickhouse's TV booth.

Rosenberg has enjoyed the gift of long, long life with his wits still about him. South suburban Harvey native Boudreau died in 2001 and Lloyd in 2003. Boudreau was inducted into the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown in 1970 for his player-manager career centered on the Cleveland Indians. And yet Lloyd has largely escaped live and posthumous honors. With Brickhouse helming a record number (more than 5,000) of televised games for a

local station, Lloyd's market profile was lower than it should have been. So when the Ford Frick Award from the Hall of Fame comes up for voting every three years from the Hall of Fame, Lloyd is inevitably left off the list of finalists.

WGN certainly should have honored Vinnie and Good Kid for number of hours logged on the air. In addition to 162 Cubs games a year plus weekend spring training contests as a full-time pairing from 1965 to 1981, Lloyd and Boudreau served as the NBA Bulls' first radio team (home games only) for four seasons starting in 1966. Since the Cubs did not make appointments for postseason baseball in the 1960s and early 1970s, the duo went right to work every Saturday airing a Big Ten football Game of the Week.

In other incarnations, Lloyd anchored a 7:45 a.m. or 11:45 a.m. TV newscast, the latter of which meant a mad dash to Wrigley Field or Comiskey Park for video pre-game shows. Lloyd also had to arrive at dawn for a stint as the sports voice on Phillips' No. 1-rated drive-time radio show, then go to Wrigley Field for a game broadcast. Fortunately the Cubs played no night home games at the time. Boudreau anchored the between-periods studio hockey show for WGN road Blackhawks telecasts. When Lloyd could sleep in a bit later in the 1970s, he took shifts as sportscaster on WGN-TV's news, aired at 10 p.m. at the time. And as long as he was in the station that late, he'd also anchor the "10:55 Sports Special" on radio.



Vince Lloyd's family gathers around the Jack Brickhouse statue in Pioneer Court next to the WGN Walk of Fame ceremony. From left are nephew Mark Skaff, great grandson Cody Pesola, daughter-in-law Sandi Zarod, granddaughter Jackie Lloyd-Kaminski, great grandson Dylan Kaminski, great granddaughter Sophie Kaminski, and grand nephews Trent Wensel and Ted Skaff.

Live commercial reads provide no relief

No rest for the weary in between innings doing a ballgame. WGN-Radio advertisers loved the baseball announcers reading their spots live. So when did Lloyd and Boudreau have time to dash for the pressbox bathroom?

Rarely. “We sweated it out,” Lloyd once said of the concept of between-innings relief.

Lloyd could not slack off after Milo Hamilton replaced him as the full-time radio play-by-play voice, teaming with Boudreau, in 1982. With the Cubs and Tribune Broadcasting under the same corporate umbrella, Lloyd was tasked teaming with Rosenberg to rebuild a long-neglected Cubs radio network. Station managers throughout the Midwest could hear Lloyd on home games, then get his famed deep baritone again on the phone when the team hit the road, pitching affiliation with the team. They didn’t often refuse. Stoked by an NL East title in 1984, the network mushroomed in size.

Walk of Fame? How ‘bout the mules pulling the wagon?

There was compensation – the undying loyalty of generations of fans. In a homier, less-security-conscious era, Cubs rooters sent up home-cooked vittles to the WGN booth. No taste testers were needed. Lloyd and Boudreau simply multi-tasked, consuming the deliveries while describing more Ron Santo heroics. That did not produce the most couth or smoothest sound, but, hey, this is the Midwest.

And if the pair could not get more kitschy than they were, in the 1970s they began ringing a cowbell for every Cubs homer. In their honor, a cowbell rang just before Jim Boudreau was introduced to accept his father’s induction.



Jim Boudreau (left), son of Lou Boudreau, was re-united with Jack Rosenberg, 91, at the WGN Walk of Fame ceremony.

“Vince was the voice of the Cubs on WGN Radio to a generation of fans,” said WGN-Radio sports director Dave Eanet, who helped organize the Walk of Fame ceremonies. “He was a broadcaster who wanted to keep the game the most important thing, while still injecting humor and his great baseball knowledge into the broadcast. Vince and Lou were one of the best tandems to ever do baseball on radio in Chicago.

“Vince’s importance to WGN Radio can’t be overstated. He was one of the signature voices. He will always have an important place in WGN history, and now a plaque on the Walk of Fame.”

Huge family contingent on hand for Lloyd

The honors promoted a family reunion. Representing him at the induction was nephew Mark Skaff, a retired Sioux City, Iowa police sergeant. Skaff was Vince Lloyd’s original

name, taken in an era when any ethnicity was purged out of a broadcaster's on-air identification. He was joined by Lloyd's daughter-in-law Sandi Zarod, granddaughters Jackie Lloyd-Kaminski and Kelli Pesola, great-grandchildren Sophie and Dylan Kaminski and Cody Pesola, and grand-nephews Ted Skaff and Trent Wensel.

"In the off-season, he'd come to Sioux City and hang out with us," said Skaff. Lloyd's older brother John Skaff lived in the northwest Iowa city, not far from the family hometown of Sioux Falls, S.D.

"He was just fun to listen to and watch. He was a hard worker, but that was the Skaff family values. Uncle Vince was just a part of that tradition."

Said Zarod: "As soon as I told them when (WGN) contacted me, the (family) were all excited. They couldn't wait to come. He was the nicest, kindest, sweetest guy. He smiled all the time. I remembered when my 11-year-old daughter at the time was putting hair rollers in his hair. He was laughing and smiling and having a good time. He was a good grandfather."

Lloyd was the lead announcer who could bust his vocal chords on an Ernie Banks homer. Boudreau could get excited in his own right with a higher-pitched voice, yet expertly explained the game. They were the perfect pair for the times.

"The thing that he brought to the broadcast to me was he taught the game from the booth," said WGN-Radio color analyst Ron Coomer in a tape played at the ceremony. Coomer grew up a Lloyd-Boudreau fan living on Chicago's Southwest Side and in suburban Lockport.

"It was really a different perspective back then as a kid. If it wasn't Jack Brickhouse calling a home run, it was more (Boudreau analyzing) why they pitched, why the guys made plays."

Once a Cubs farmhand while his father was still on the air, Jim Boudreau was thankful to accept the honor.

"He'd be thrilled with this," he said. "I never saw him turn down an autograph request. People told us (along with sister Barbara) at his funeral that we had no idea about, how he helped certain people, We'd just look at each other and, wow, we didn't know that. He would think this was awesome.

"It's neat he's going in with Vince and Jack. Even though he's not here, he's kind of here, because Jack's here. The three of them, they were like Larry, Moe and Curly together. They were awesome."

Definitely, holy mackerel! And, always, no doubt about it!