

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Lifetime of achievement continues for 'Rosey' at 90

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Posted Monday, May 16, 2016*

Happy 90th birthday, Rosey, on May 21.

Many of the greats of WGN's unforgettable golden years of baseball coverage have sadly departed, and are dearly missed. But Jack Rosenberg soldiers on, still with his wits and health intact, and dedication to another big "get" – helping Swedish Covenant Hospital raise \$8 million for the women's health center named after his late wife Mayora Rosenberg.

Assembling the latest medical technology in a secure, all-women's setting is real life and thus a greater feat than anything Rosenberg accomplished in the toy factory of sports. In almost every broadcast from 1954 to 1981 by Jack Brickhouse, the most ubiquitous voice in Chicago TV-radio history, there was Rosey backing him up with scripts, notes, research and his people personality landing big-name pre- and post-game interviews.

Rosey's title was WGN's "sports editor," but he might as well been executive producer with all his myriad tasks. Always accompanying him was his trusty manual typewriter he still possesses at his Lincolnwood home. Rosey pecking away on the keyboard in the booth while Brickhouse described a Cubs or White Sox game was the soundtrack of our baseball summers back in the day. He continued on in much of the same role for Harry Caray for another decade after Brickhouse retired from the daily play-by-play grind.

One of the highlights of this job is to talk about his career with Rosey. You'd never have enough time in the day. Sometimes his memory is a bit foggy and he can be excused at this juncture. He and Bill Lotzer, the late Arne Harris' predecessor as baseball director, are the last souls remaining from the decades when WGN put on a near-network-



The WGN-TV crew in the early 1970s: (from left) sports editor Jack Rosenberg, play-by-play man Jack Brickhouse, producer-director Arne Harris and No. 2 announcer Jim West.

quality broadcast with four cameras and unbelievable crew camaraderie. Lotzer also will mark his 90th birthday this year. He and Rosey started at WGN six months apart in 1954.

They all learned to improvise on the fly, such as the time Don Cardwell no-hit the Cardinals on May 15, 1960 at Wrigley Field in a telecast directed by Lotzer. The preserved videotape showed Rosey buzzing about the booth behind Brickhouse, lining up Warren Giles and John Holland as Tenth Inning guests. Meanwhile, in the chaos on the field, the diminutive, pre-hairpiece Harris tried to hold back the happy throngs from mobbing Cardwell. Harris applied enough body English to enable Vince Lloyd to interview Cardwell moments after Joe Cunningham lined into a shoetop catch by Moose Moryn in left field to complete the no-no.

Rosey, of course, used diplomacy and a silver tongue – Lotzer claimed a \$100 payment helped – to get baseball people to do the pre-game interview on the field on “The Leadoff Man” just 15 minutes before the first pitch. An even greater accomplishment was booking the uniformed crowd to walk up the ramps in cleats for “The Tenth Inning” in the booth with Brickhouse.

His talents extended as far as 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue when he lined up a 1981 interview for Brickhouse with President Ronald Reagan at the White House. He pulled some considerable political strings to set up the chat. Rosey and Brickhouse got bonus time when Reagan got immersed in talking about the Cubs. The Gipper could not forget how his coverage of the North Siders as a WHO-Radio (Des Moines) announcer during spring training on Catalina Island in 1937 helped segue into a movie career.

Rosey quickly rates his best interviews when asked.

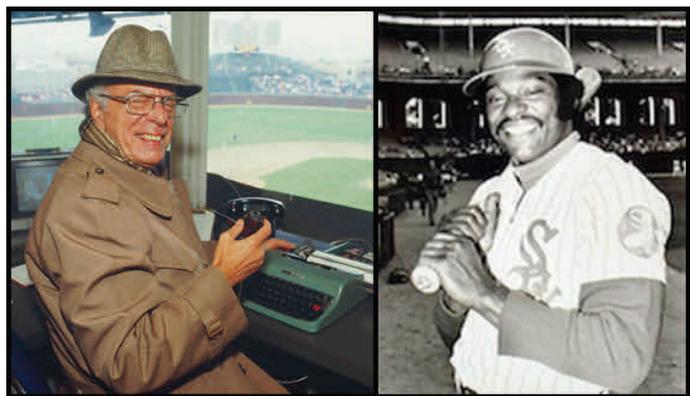
“One was Ernie Banks and everyone knows his story,” he said. “We had great interviews with Jackie Robinson. Ron Santo was always a pleasure to deal with.”

An interview Dick Allen enjoyed

But he picked the days before his milestone birthday to reveal a man who was “tremendous:” Dick Allen.

Never known as a media favorite and always seemingly playing to the beat of his own drummer, Allen would have not been in a talking mood in the fractious last couple of seasons in 1968-69 with the Phillies. Responding to the fans’ cat-calls at Connie Mack Stadium, Allen scratched out the word “Boo” in the dirt while he played first base.

Brickhouse had asked Allen if he could guest on “The Tenth Inning.”



Jack Rosenberg (left) with his trusty manual typewriter in the Wrigley Field broadcast booth. Rosey mightily impressed Dick Allen (right) in setting up a 1969-vintage interview at Connie Mack Stadium.

“There were those that said Dick didn’t keep his appointments,” Rosey recalled. “The bottom of the eighth inning, I left the booth and went down to the runway by the Phillies dugout and waited for the game to end. Dick came through from the field.

“I told him so you don’t have to go up on the elevator, we will do interview in front of your dugout in about five minutes. I want you to know, Dick, that all of us at WGN TV and Radio appreciate how you’ve cooperated with us through the years.

“Dick said, ‘You want to know something, all the years I’ve been in baseball, this is the first time anybody thanked me for anything. I’m going to do the interview, don’t worry.’ He did the interview.”

WGN’s grand poo-bah watched Allen, and reacted the way you’d want a bossman to do.

“Ward Quaal later sent a memo to Jack Brickhouse and me that it was the greatest baseball interview he had ever seen,” Rosey said.

Allen did not forget the professionalism he was accorded.

“I was ‘Mr. Rosenberg’ to him and he couldn’t have been nicer the rest of his career,” Rosey said. “Dick disappeared for awhile, nobody knew where he was. One day, he calls me at the office: ‘Mr. Rosenberg, I know you’re probably worried about me. I’m with my mom. I’m OK, but please don’t tell anybody that I called you.’

“I never told anybody ‘till now. He would up being a great friend. I was always ‘Mr. Rosenberg’ to him.”

I might be tempted to call him “Mr. Rosenberg,” too. But “Rosey” is the mark of affection, a nickname for a talented colleague who has done it all – and is not finished yet.

Here’s to many more Happy Birthdays, Rosey.