



Remembering Tim Sassone

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We should prize old-school sportswriters who have one-on-one relationships with all the important figures on the beat they cover and can scare up a scoop with well-placed phone calls.

Tim Sassone was just such a scribe. And as good of a Blackhawks and NHL writer as he was for the Daily Herald, he was an even better person. Sassone did not subscribe to the disturbing trend of raging egos and group-think work styles endemic in sports journalists today. He treated all colleagues as equals, even with his standout status.

To paraphrase the late Jerome Holtzman, Tim Sassone was a good man to find on a long day's march. Unfortunately, the rest of us will have to rack up the shoe leather without Tim. He died much too young at 58 after a long illness on March 24.

Like Holtzman in baseball, Sassone was dean of Chicago writers in his sport, having started on the Hawks beat for the Daily Herald during its massive expansion of pro sports coverage in 1988. No, he didn't smoke a cigar. But he could sport a cynical or quizzical look, which served its purposes. He loved covering hockey, a sport he knew cold, and hated hockey incompetence -- on ice, on the coaching lines or in the front office. All the while, reporting it as he saw it -- and he witnessed a ton of Hawks negatives prior to 2007 -- Sassone earned the respect in every last corner of the United Center and previously at Chicago Stadium.



Blackhawks announcer Ed Olczyk (left) and former Hawks star/coach Denis Savard (right) flank Tim Sassone when the team gave him a special No. 25 sweater in 2013 in honor of his quarter-century on the Hawks beat for the Daily Herald. Photo courtesy of Chicago Blackhawks.

When the Hawks had scattered for the summer, Sassone was just as comfortable filling in on baseball for the Daily Herald. With the increased daily access of baseball up until recent years, he would have been a ballscribe star with his low-key ways a natural for working all ends of local clubhouses. But baseball's loss was hockey's big gain. He was the go-to guy for Hawks coverage, period, in the Chicago market.

"For 26 years Tim painted a picture for Blackhawks fans and worked tirelessly to be a great reporter," said Hawks executive VP Jay Blunk, who began in the old-school era as a Chicago Cubs media relations intern in the mid- 1980s. "The entire organization was proud to work with Tim each and every day as he was driven to bring the hockey to life on the pages of the Daily Herald. He will be missed by everyone at the United Center and around the National Hockey League. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family."

Colleagues can't do anything but sing his praises and wish Sassone hadn't left us so soon. The only writer who exceeded Sassone in longevity on the Hawks was Tim Cronin, a true hockey aficionado and golf and sports broadcasting historian. Cronin covered the Hawks starting in 1978 for the Daily Southtown-Star, then more recently for the Associated Press.

"Tim Sassone was a master craftsman of journalism," he said. "He knew a good story when he saw one and knew how to make it better. Tim would always, always ask the most salient question, the one that would elicit either the best quote of the night or reveal the unseen truth.

"He was both a solid reporter and a gifted writer. The former was obvious by his command of the facts, but the latter was more subtle. Tim didn't get fancy. He got to the point. He was able to say in 25 well-chosen words what others failed to say in 100. And he was brilliant on deadline."

But Sassone's work was only one dimension of the man.

"He was also a great guy," Cronin said. "He would poke fun, grouse about perceived sins, help those new to the beat – the (Chicago) Tribune's probably had eight writers since Tim took the Herald beat in 1988 – and was very much a friend.

"He was fun to play golf with, even when – and it was almost inevitable – he was mad about a shot and would fling a club. I've known him since the early 1980s, when he was at the Star/Herald, as the Chicago Heights Star's Orland Park edition was then known, and knew immediately that he would go far.



Jay Blunk. Photo courtesy of Chicago Blackhawks.

"I never thought he would leave us so early. It's awful. I feel most for his family, which he loved and adored."

Rest in peace, Tim. Heartfelt condolences go to wife Christine, daughter Alison and son Andrew. Visitation was scheduled from 3 to 8 p.m. Monday, March 31, at Blake Lamb Funeral Home, 5015 Lincoln Ave. in Lisle, Ill. Memorial services were scheduled at the same location at 11 a.m. Tuesday, April 1.