

Ed Heather

August 13, 1940 -

Ed Heather had a lifelong love for the two quintessentially Canadian sports of hockey and baseball, and he put that love to good use.

"I've been fortunate to be involved with some championship teams and some great people," he said, "so for me to last as long as I did wouldn't have been possible without those other people."

As a youth, he enjoyed playing sports, but, he said, "I knew my limitations. We played for fun. I played on some good teams but it wasn't me who made them good."

His involvement in local sport has spanned a wide spectrum, from helping to coach house league peewee baseball teams to being a trainer with Senior A hockey squads.

Along the way he provided more than a little help in stepson Rob Ducey's baseball career.

As a scout for the Toronto Blue Jays he won the Toronto Sun's annual scout-of-the-year honour, an award that has also been won by Bill Scherrer of Buffalo, N.Y., (Marlins); Bill McKenzie of Ottawa (Rockies); Tim Harkness of Oshawa (Padres) and Walt Jeffries of Paris, Ont., (Jays), among others.

Heather had a much-sought-after encyclopaedic mind when it came to local sports, being able to make connections between players, statistics, and seeing the big picture and being able to put it all into context.

As a kid growing up in Galt he was a frequent presence at local ballparks like Dickson and Waterworks. "I was a gopher and chased balls that were hit over the fence at batting practice," he said.

In the winters, his uncle, Ed O'Brien, would often take him to Galt Arena to see hockey games.

From 1952-56 he could be found on Shade Street, out front of the arena, peddling programs for the Galt Junior A Black Hawks on game nights.

"I sold them for a penny a program, and then I'd get in for free to the hockey games. I'd usually sell about 150 programs and then take any leftover programs home."

That proved to be the start of a long and unofficial career as a hockey and baseball collector and historian.

Later, he would be asked to serve as an assistant trainer to Toots Last with the Galt Hornets Sr. A team from 1966-69.

When Last died, he took over as head trainer from 1970-74.

The Hornet years were glory years for the locals as they captured two Allan Cups (1968-69, and 1970-71).

"We had some good coaching – Wig Wylie, for example – and were a powerhouse really. They were great years. We went to Europe a couple of times to play in the Ahearne Cup."

On one such trip in January of 1972 the Hornets were beaten out by a star-studded Russian squad boasting some players with names like Valery Kharlamov and Alexander Yakushev who, before the year was out, would become household names thanks to the Canada-Russia hockey series.

The first trip overseas for the Hornets was in 1969-70, over the Christmas holidays, and the team had an opportunity to play exhibitions in Germany, among other places.

"We went to East Berlin," he noted, "and it was during the Cold War. It wasn't like crossing the border at Fort Erie. I can still remember the Russians with their machine guns at Checkpoint Charlie. But the East German beer was good and the people were nice."

It was in East Berlin where Heather and other members of the Hornet entourage saw some sobering things, such as hundreds of East Berliners gazing longingly over to the West, across No Man's Land. "They were just staring, motionless," he recalled.

Not many years earlier the Wall had been constructed, and U.S. President John F. Kennedy had proclaimed (June 26, 1963), "Ich bin ein Berliner."

The Galtonians had a chance to visit Paris, London and other European places, and the memories of those trips, shared by the players and coaches alike, would last a lifetime.

There is no doubt about hockey's hold on Heather, yet it was baseball that captivated him in later years. "I'd say baseball is my first love," he said in 2007. "Hockey used to be but I haven't followed it as closely lately, whereas baseball is something I still follow and am still involved in."

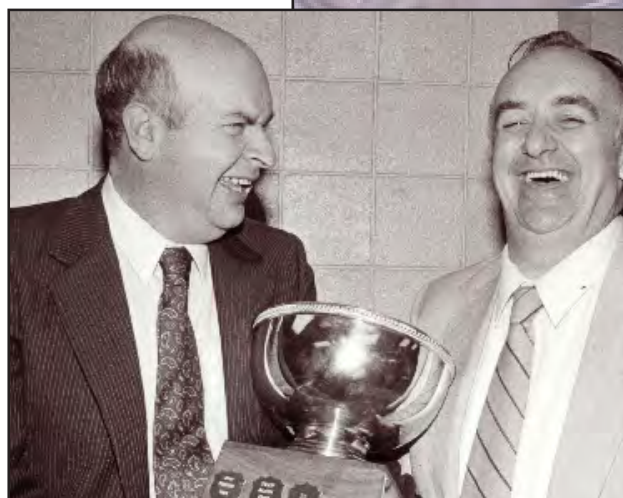
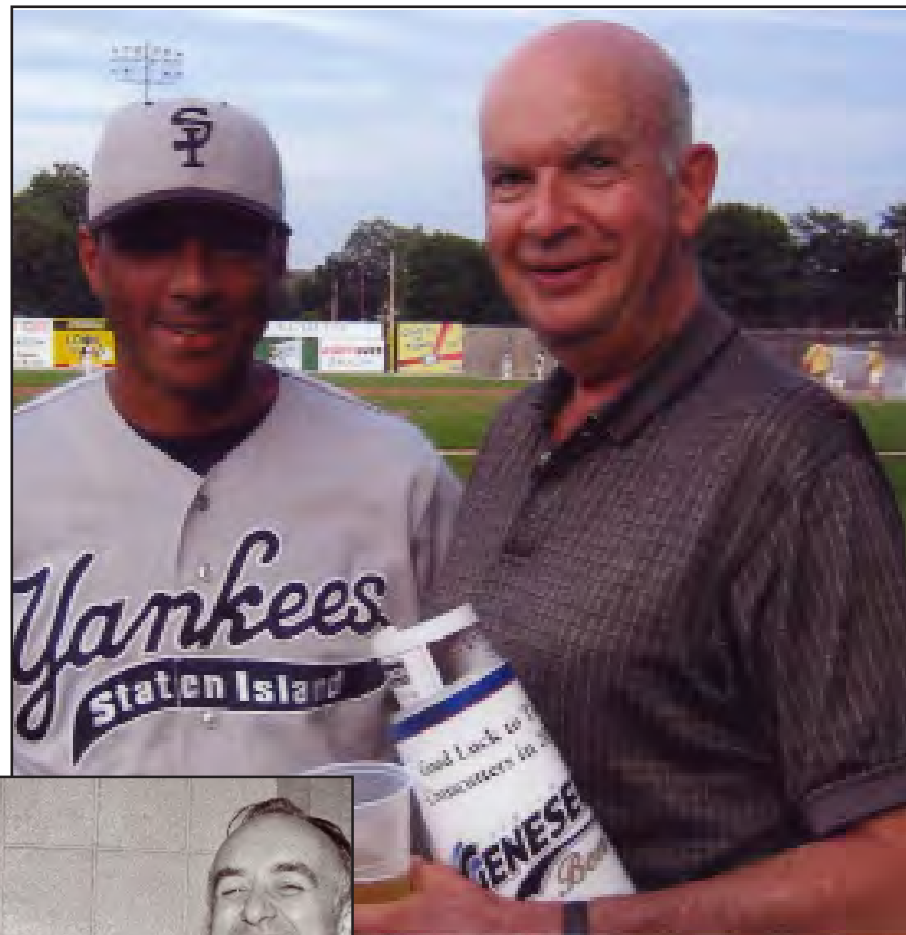
Along the way he was involved as a partner in a local sports store with Al Findlay and Paul Stone. A young Rob Ducey often worked there part-time.

In many ways, the store became a kind of hot stove lounge where movers and shakers from Cambridge's sports community would come and go, often just to shoot the breeze. It was a gathering place, and made what later became Ed Heather Awards the place to go for trophies and awards.

The store was a natural offshoot for the baseball and hockey-loving Heather. He knew baseball, and he could spot a good talent from a distance.

"He always did look out for kids," said longtime friend Al Findlay. "He had the kids interests at heart."

Another longtime friend, Cam Allan, a former high school football coach and colleague with the Galt Terriers Intercounty Baseball team, said Heather had an abiding interest in



Cambridge's Rob Ducey, above, with stepfather Ed Heather. At left, Heather receives the Don and Benita Rope Sports Contributor Award from longtime friend Al Findlay.

baseball and hockey.

"He was only involved in baseball for one reason - the kids," said Allan. "He never sought, actually shunned personal accolades. He did his volunteer work without fanfare and wanted it this way. He is Cambridge's 'Mr. Baseball.'"

In 1975 Heather helped in the re-birth of the Terriers, whose long and storied past went back to the beginning of the Intercounty in 1919. Allan would manage the team, while Heather was director of player personnel.

In the team's fourth year they won the league title, and in 1981 Heather was among a group who helped begin the Junior Intercounty Bulldogs. He stayed with the team for eight years and was there when they won the championship in 1983-84.

In 1992 he started scouting with the Toronto Blue Jays, a role he stuck with until 2003. "I like the game," said Heather.

Even in the years after the turn of the century, Heather could be seen coaching youngsters at local ballparks. "He was a very good teacher of baseball," said Findlay. "No kid was too strong or weak for his attention. He gives to every kid. Eddie used to watch a lot of ball games. He was always scouting. He could read things in kids -- for example, if they had soft hands -- and he could always pick talent."

What's the secret for developing good players?

"You've got to have the ability," he says of players, "but if you can get the kids to work hard, and they enjoy what they're doing and you're able to bring out the best in them, that's all you can ask for and all that matters. You're trying to build character and that goes a lot further than anything. You can only play a sport for so long, but character lasts a lifetime."

Which explained, perhaps, why the philosophies of people like coaches Wig Wylie and Bud Fraser remained a prominent fixture in Heather's mind.

One young player who appreciated his work was Scott Simmons, not even a teenager when he said: "Ed's the best coach I've ever had."

Heather continued to be involved with baseball, and in 2007 was with the Premier Baseball League of Ontario's Terriers, a team of 16-18 year-olds. They were coming off a year in which they won the Sandlot World Series title in Nashville, Tenn.

"Ed Heather was one of cogs in the Toronto Blue Jays network of amateur scouts across Canada until 2004," said Toronto Sun baseball writer Bob Elliott. "With this laid-back, personable approach he could meet a player or a coach once and it was if they had known him for years. He's a tireless worker."

Inducted 2006