

Foreword

ANGELO CATALDI

IN THE FINAL YEARS of his extraordinary life, Stan Hochman often thanked me for providing the final act of his career, his three-year tenure as the Grand Imperial Poobah of Sports on my WIP radio show. I had to keep reminding him that it was I who should be thanking him for the wit and wisdom that he provided on a weekly basis.

Since his passing, I have said so many times on the air how much I miss him, and not just for his pithy commentary as the Poobah. I miss his unrivaled versatility, his clever turns of phrase, his refreshing worldview, and especially his courage to point fingers and name names.

I'm going to send the sportswriters in this city a copy of this book, because it captures everything that made Stan Hochman great—and exposes all that is lacking in many of his successors.

Above all, Stan suffered no fools—and if there's one thing we can always say about Philadelphia sports, it is that we never lack the kind of clueless clods upon whom Stan feasted. My favorite was the weekly skewering he gave to Norman "Bottom Line" Braman, the greedy used-car salesman who owned the Eagles in the 1980s and 1990s.

Stan feared no one. He did his job with only his readers in mind, and this commitment came through in every brilliant column he wrote. What I never considered was where these potent opinions came from, a mind that was every bit as sharp in Stan's eighties as it had been for all the decades that had come before.

Every Wednesday during the Poobah years, I would send Stan the questions of the week, the biggest issues that had arisen in Philadelphia sports over the previous seven days. Sometimes, he would script his answers, although his gruff delivery always seemed spontaneous. I cannot deny that, at times, I would slip in something that was not on the list. Stan never—not once—came up short. Often, those responses were his best.

There is so much more I could write about Stan, but these words are only keeping you from reading more of the entertaining, provocative work of a far better writer, and a far better man.

Savor every word of these columns. They represent the work of a wordsmith with no peer, a loyal family man, and a person I was honored to call a friend.

A Message from the Honorable Edward G. Rendell

STAN WAS SO POPULAR AND SO LOVED because he was just like the Philly sports fans: cantankerous, angry, opinionated, and incredibly knowledgeable. But he loved our teams. Some time ago, I wrote a column for the *Daily News* about the appropriateness of booing. Stan called me and said, “Boy, we should do a book together on when fans should boo and when they shouldn’t.” I’m disappointed we never got to write that book.

Stan also liked to have fun. He was hysterical as the Grand Imperial Poobah on WIP’s *Morning Show*, with Angelo Cataldi. If I heard he was going to be on in fifteen minutes, I’d push back whatever I had scheduled and tune in. He always made me laugh.

Stan was just like the rest of us, only smarter. Just like the rest of us, only funnier. Just like the rest of us, only more honest. I think you’ll see that as you read this memorable, to-be-savored collection of Stan’s work.

A while back, I was talking to someone about Stan, and I said, “If God is Jewish, he’ll look and sound just like Stan Hochman.”

Excerpt • Temple University Press

Introduction

GLORIA HOCHMAN

STAN WAS THE QUINTESSENTIAL Renaissance man. He loved cool jazz and soulful singers, chilled chardonnay and sizzling lamb ragout, Shakespeare in the round and theater with Mark Rylance. He was passionate about social justice and harmonious race relations, a society where drugs meant antibiotics, not heroin. His sometimes-gruff exterior concealed a cushy niche for the well-being of children, whom he was certain thrived on praise and unconditional love. Most of all, he adored his family. When he baked wild salmon and poured fine wine for us—for me; our daughter, Anndee; our daughter-in-law, Elissa; our granddaughter, Sasha—he declared himself the luckiest man in the world.

You'll see all of that reflected in his writing: his meticulously crafted words about Pete Rose and whether he belongs in the Baseball Hall of Fame; Jackie Robinson and his struggle to become the first black baseball player in the big leagues; the tragic 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, where thirteen Israelis were killed in a chilling blot on the world's showcase for sports excellence; his unique take on Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali.

You'll see references to mental health; the inner workings of athletes who grew up poor and deprived; the toll of a hidden illness, such as gambling; the strength and determination that can result in the construction of a field where kids with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and other disabilities can play ball.

Stan often said to me, “I write about fun and games. You write about life and death.” We talked at the dinner table about how it all came together, and Stan’s writing was laced with the results of those talks. He was more interested in how athletes felt, what their values were, how they lived their lives, what made them tick than he was about how many runs they scored or punches they landed. He wrote to hit a nerve, to challenge the way people thought and felt and dreamed and lived their lives. Even when he was days away from death, he smiled when Rich Hofmann, then the *Daily News* sports editor, told him that his column on Dick Allen’s belonging in the Baseball Hall of Fame, one he had written a couple of days before entering the hospital, had been the most-read feature in the paper the previous week. It was one of the last columns he wrote, and I believe that message from Rich soothed him, told him that his readers got it, that his life’s work counted.

Throughout our marriage, I was mesmerized by how much Stan knew about so many things. No matter the category, he could answer every question on *Jeopardy*. His knowledge of sports, every sport—baseball, football, hockey, horse racing, boxing, golf, tennis—was endless, and his recall, even for events that had happened fifty years earlier, was astonishing. He wrote quickly and easily, often a column, a sidebar, and a story in just a couple of hours.

As I read through more than seven thousand columns and stories to select the ones I chose for this book, I smiled, and then I cried. And I continued to be dazzled by his way with words. I think you will be, too.

With glorious memories and with so much love,

Gloria Hochman

Stan's "Zingers"

IF YOU WANT TO READ SCORES AND STATISTICS, you won't find them here. If you want the inside story into the hearts and minds of the major sports stars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; if you want to be center stage at the most memorable sports events of our times; if you want to read, for the first time or the tenth, Stan's acerbic, irreverent, one-of-a-kind take on it all, this is a book you'll read, reread, and gift to the sports lovers in your life. *Transcending sports, this collection, destined to become a classic, is for anyone who savors the magic of deliciously insightful writing. Stan was known for his "zingers." Here are just a few, to get you started.*

Owls Find a Knockout Punch—Kefalos and Williams

Philadelphia Daily News

December 24, 1964

[After Temple's Jim Williams scored 30 points in a rousing win, Penn coach Jack McCloskey] looked like a guy who had wrestled a case of TNT and lost.

Good Humor Man Helps

Philadelphia Daily News

May 6, 1965

Jim Bunning has a mind like a bank vault, cold and efficient. Johnny Callison sulks around like someone in constant mourning. Richie Allen enjoys fun, but words like "boy" set his teeth on edge. Then there's the manager, who is usually as grim as three-day-old raisin pudding.

Short Swing, a Full Life

Philadelphia Daily News

May 25, 1966

Doug Sanders swings a golf club like a man trying to kill a rattlesnake with a garden hoe.

No Wonder Bunning Enjoys Tipping “The Hat”

Philadelphia Daily News

August 26, 1966

Jim Bunning has a wife and nine kids, which sounds like 10 good reasons for getting keyed-up for every start he makes.

Spitz: Scared Shiftless or Just a Puppet?

Philadelphia Daily News

September 6, 1972

Mark Spitz is as shallow as a pie plate. Mark Spitz is as deep and as loveable as a saucer filled with vinegar. Mark Spitz has a chance to make it big in the movies if they bring back Charlie McCarthy films and he can tote along swim coach Sherm Chavoor to play the Edgar Bergen role. Has anyone ever written the script for an X-rated puppet show?

Frazier to Smoke Foreman?

Philadelphia Daily News

April 28, 1976

George Foreman has a heart like a lion and a head like a cantaloupe.

Bob Lemon: The Yanks’ Quiet Man

Philadelphia Daily News

October 17, 1978

He sits there in the dugout like he’s carved out of Ivory soap. Wears wire rim glasses that perch on an incredible nose, all red and crinkly like a spoiled persimmon.

Tose One Who's Not Selling

Philadelphia Daily News

July 16, 1981

Leonard Tose loves the heat in the kitchen. Thrives on it. Gets a psychic tan from it. Hotter it gets, the better he likes it. Bring on the bankers and the bluenoses and the boobirds. Bring on the divorce attorneys. Bring on the tough-talking truck drivers. Leonard Tose has a vocabulary that will melt their transmissions.

Matuszek Hangs On to Job, Sanity

Philadelphia Daily News

April 23, 1984

Len Matuszek hit .282 this spring, led the club in doubles with 10. Drove in 14 runs. Nobody drove in more. That's like climbing Mount Everest with a piano on your back. Wearing roller skates. With a frayed rope. "It was unlike any spring I've ever gone through before," Matuszek said, after a training camp only Abbott and Costello could have loved.

Betting Must Step into Big Time

Philadelphia Daily News

May 28, 1985

If [overly optimistic Garden State Park chairman Bob] Brennan had been captain of the Titanic, he would have broken out the vodka and told the passengers to use the iceberg for ice cubes.

Jaworski Can Run, but He Couldn't Slide

Philadelphia Daily News

September 29, 1986

Rams flushed Ron Jaworski out of the pocket and linebacker Jim Laughlin jolted him hard enough to bust the quarterback's shoulder pads and scramble his neurons.

"I've gotta learn how to slide," Jaworski said sheepishly, 40 minutes after the Eagles stunned the Rams, 34–20.

Jaworski did look like a student in the Jeff Stone School of Sliding and Vinyl Upholstering, tumbling awkwardly into Laughlin's path.

Winners giggle and losers grumble. But that is the second time in three weeks Jaworski has wobbled to the sideline with guys guiding him by the armpits, a worrisome thing that will lead you to sing the blues in the night.

Phillie Mignon Just a Veale Cutlet

Philadelphia Daily News

May 9, 1989

The Phillies face Sandy Koufax tonight. They warmed up for Koufax by facing Pittsburgh's Bob Veale on a cloudy, gray afternoon. It's like warming up to wrestle alligators by playing water polo with sharks.

Last Dance: Ryan Brings Down Curtain after Evans Puts On a Show

Philadelphia Daily News

October 23, 1989

Dick Clark called. He gave the game a 69, terrible lyrics, but you could dance to it, and he wondered if Byron Evans would be available for the next "American Bandstand" special. Evans intercepted a pass late in the third quarter and he felt so good about it, he put on his dancing shoes and did 12 seconds' worth of hully-gully like a guy walking barefoot over hot coals. What in the name of Fred Astaire is going on here?

Try to Think of the Bright Side

Philadelphia Daily News

December 16, 1991

It's over.

You don't have to wait for the fat lady to warble. It's over.

Oh, sure, if the Saints faint and lose two in a row . . . and the 49ers lose next week . . . and the Eagles beat Washington, the Eagles can wriggle into the playoffs.

And if the special teams play the way they played yesterday, the Eagles couldn't beat Martha Washington. They couldn't beat Charles Barkley's grandmother, even if she's double-teamed.

It's over.

Phils Success Has Been Catching

Philadelphia Daily News

May 24, 1995

Gene Harris, the [Phils] setup man, is as somber as a one-car funeral.

What These Games Are All About

Philadelphia Daily News

July 25, 1995

Izzy, the official Olympic mascot, has an egg-shaped upper body, spindly legs, a fuzzy tongue, a red nose and deep black circles around his eyes. Sort of like John Kruk with a brutal hangover.

Murray's Deli Sports a Familiar Feel

Philadelphia Daily News

February 12, 1999

It is not true that Michael Barkann, Pennsylvania Sportscaster of the Year, takes his lunch intravenously. At Murray's Delicatessen in Bala Cynwyd, he orders a New York-style pastrami sandwich, spreading out of two slices of rye bread. New York-style means the waitress never smiles.

Conklin Makes a Good Impression

Philadelphia Daily News

April 2, 1999

The *Daily News* accountants will be pleased. I took Reggie White, Rich Kotite, Ray Rhodes, Bill Campbell, Johnny Mathis and Bill Clinton to lunch at Potcheen in the Sheraton Rittenhouse Square, and the entire tab was \$30.50, plus tip.

Actually, I took sports comedian Joe Conklin to lunch, and he did White, Kotite, Rhodes, Campbell, Mathis, Clinton and a half-dozen other voices during a rollicking meal that was both delicious and reasonably priced.

Last time he checked his list, he had 185 voices on it, "including dead guys." Most of them athletes and coaches, some of them entertainers, some of them politicians. He does a dead-on Clinton, offering

nubile interns “a position on my staff” in that raspy southern sincere drawl.

Chef Vola’s [Stan’s Favorite Atlantic City Restaurant]

Philadelphia Daily News

July 18, 2003

Louise’s banana cream pie is still the most fun you can have in Atlantic City with your clothes on.