



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

FOR YEARS the sports writers room in our daily newspapers was laughingly referred to as the toy department.

Writers and editors of the other departments used to envy the sports writers and for a good reason. The sports writers never had to cover murders, big fires, and all sorts of crime and unpleasant news. Meanwhile the sports fellows spent their time in the press box at the ball parks, or along the boards at the hockey games, or in the best seats as the major fights. Day after day they were accused of playing games or enjoying themselves.

But times have changed. Now sports writing is placed on a higher level for the simple reason that sports contests have played an important role in dealing the slumping economy. In fact it was the sports pages that buoyed the spirits of the needy in times of trouble because it gave them something pleasant to think about.

THIS IS not a new happening. For those of you who can remember, it was the Detroit Tigers who lifted the spirits of the entire state back in the early 30s. In 1934, they won the pennant, their first in 25 years. The entire area went wild. It mattered little that the Tigers lost to the Cardinals in the World Series. The downtrodden had something to talk about other than trouble.

It was the same in 1935 when Micky Cochrane drove the Tigers to another pennant and this time to victory over the National League rivals — the Chicago Cubs — in the World Series.

The area went "crazy" as the saying goes with all sorts of parades, gatherings and celebrations. In all of this the slumping economy was almost forgotten.

Remember, those were the days when the banks had been closed and workers were being paid in scrip. But the hardships were put on the backburner, as they say, during all the celebration over the Tiger victory.

Now, we're going through another economic

slump. Michigan has been declared a disaster area and thousands are depending on food stations for their meals.

Ordinarily, it would be a time of great worry with little to buoy the spirits. But into this picture has come sports again.

The Detroit Lions made it to the pro football playoffs. It matters little how they got there. It was the means of helping to raise the spirits of the populace again. The Tigers, despite their fourth place finish, attracted more than a million fans during the season. It was one of the best years in attendance. And over at Ann Arbor the Michigan football program drew more than 100,000 spectators for each home game on the schedule.

And with the Detroit area suffering from the "hard times," the college hockey tournament at Joe Louis arena attracted the largest crowd in hockey history. More than 21,000 jammed every nook and corner in the arena.

This was the therapy the folks needed to take their minds off the low status of the auto industry and the other slowdowns that resulted in record ranks of the unemployed.

So, no longer, should the sports writers rooms of the newspapers be referred to as the toy department.

The sports writers are helping to boost the spirits of those who are looking for another Franklin Roosevelt to lift the country out of the same kind of depression that gripped the country back in the '30s.

Auto theft is a growth industry

WHILE SOME businesses may thrive or perish, there's one that produces nothing but banner years — auto theft.

Some law enforcement officials regard auto theft as a victimless crime because in most cases an insurance company reimburses the person whose car has been ripped off. But others argue that we all pay for the thefts in higher insurance premiums.



Jackie Klein

Auto theft doesn't rank with bank robbery or murder. So light or suspended sentences for car thieves are fairly common. The leniency may even extend to professionals involved in rings.

Although many still consider auto theft a teen-aged prank, police in the metropolitan area are getting reports from victims whose cars are stolen at gunpoint.

Stolen cars are often used in the commission of other crimes. Organized crime has discovered that car theft is a lucrative source of income.

ACCORDING TO experts, 1983 promises to be another record-setter for light-fingered Louie and his pals. The chance of any car owner ever seeing his stolen vehicle again grows slimmer by the year. Cars that are found are often stripped down, wrecked or chopped up — components of a local chop shop operator. The low recovery rate is an indicator of organized crime's involvement, according to the National Auto Theft Bureau.

Auto theft is a high profit, low-risk operation. A pro can steal a car of his choice in less than two minutes despite attempts to improve vehicle security.

Enterprising chop shops, salvage yards and repair shops which knowingly deal in stolen parts all make a sizeable profit. The consumer winds up with a raw deal.

THE FINAL price tag must take into account what car theft ultimately costs

the auto insurance consumer and the undetermined amount for the expenses of theft victims which can never be reimbursed.

Crime experts now believe that at least 10,000 stolen vehicles are annually spirited away to Mexico. Some are bartered for narcotics. Others are shipped overseas to Central and South America, Europe and Asia.

Because car theft is a complex crime, there are no simple solutions. One partial answer would require manufacturers to stamp the vehicle identification number on several parts of the car, rather than just the engine, making it harder to sell a stolen part.

Other suggestions by crime experts are increased manpower and budgets for car theft investigation, greater public awareness and regulations to cut down chop shops and crack down on illegal salvage operations.

With sound state and federal legislation and the combined efforts of auto manufacturers, insurers and law enforcement agencies, auto theft may no longer be so easy to get away with.



Shirlee Rose Iden

Winter, where is thy sting?

WITH TONGUE in cheek, I've always answered the barbs of sunbirds and dwellers of the semi-tropics that there's nothing like the changing of the seasons.

Now here it is just about three weeks to Groundhog Day, and even Sonny Elliot would have trouble measuring the snowfall or lack of it.

This is written the morning after our first visible snow appeared. It came in the evening, swiftly. There it was, the white stuff, about an eighth of an inch of it. But this morning looking out at the little blue car in my drive, not a flake was left.

My rationale for writing about this is that even though we may get a blizzard by the time of publication, the tail end of 1982 has been strange in terms of weather.

It seems to me you have to plow some snow, make a snowman, wear your boots every day and curse the icy winds to believe it's late December or early January.

Instead, the Tigers plot a Feb. 18 spring training for pitchers and catchers, and we haven't had winter yet.

Many municipalities are saving money by making last year's salt last, having no streets to plow and no new salt and chemical expenditures to withstand.

That's OK. But a lot of little kids did try to figure out how Santa Claus, Rudolph, and the other reindeer even got here at all. The ones I know are beginning to cease worrying and just enjoy the largesse no matter how it arrived.

If you ski downhill I guess there's lots of artificial snow to keep you happy or the option to go north, young athlete. For cross country skiers, there's just gloom, or switching to ice skates.

Area residents, you may recall, used cross country skis to traverse their subdivisions during the frigid, snowy days of 1981-82, when winter was winter. It was a practical way to travel.

Sometimes I wonder why I went through the expense of winterizing my car. But I've never trusted Mother Nature since the ice storm of three springs ago when it seemed we were living in the Glacier Age.

FARMERS a little north of Oakland County are in the fields still harvesting corn and mending fences. And closer neighbors have gotten out rakes and brooms to clean up the last of the fall leaves. Joggers are having a field day.

I've even given up on buying a new pair of black boots after several shopping forays. Why bother?

The truth is, I do like the changing of the seasons with spring and fall my top favorites. As for winter, I like those crisp, clear sunny days when, if there is snow, it's already neatly plowed, and the streets are clear.

You have to admit, we have had to scrape some frost on early mornings and sliver through pretty gusty winds, but I'm not complaining.

Today being my birthday, I'm entitled to a wish, even a whimsical one. Wouldn't it be a cherry lift for sports fans to be able to forget their economic, hunger and unemployment troubles and watch the Tigers do their spring thing in 80 degrees at Tiger Stadium?

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