

# Eddie Edgar — storyteller and friend

OUR BELOVED, pennant-bound (watch 'em roll in August) Tigers can thank the late Eddie Edgar, at least in part, for one of the favorable imprints they have made during the first two months of the '86 season.

When Eddie sat in the Tiger Stadium press box April 7, it marked the 63rd successive year he had attended the ball club's home opener. The skein started with a 4-3 victory over Cleveland in 1924 when "W.W." was a neophyte Free Press sports writer fresh from the Pennsylvania Dutch country.

It ended with a 6-5 win over Boston, and somehow I like to think that the gods who rule in such matters, Jack Morris included, sensed that Eddie would die 41 days later at age 88 and wanted to send him out as a winner. What that victory did,

you see, was make his personal home opener record \$2-31 — putting the Tigers one game over .500.

This man who had become the dean of Michigan's working journalists took rightful pride in the host of awards that had been heaped upon him through 24 years with the Free Press, 18 more as executive secretary of the Bowling Proprietors of Greater Detroit and then 20 as an editor, feature writer and columnist for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

BUT AS the years piled up, few on-going things became more important to Eddie than being on hand the following spring when the umpire again cried, "Play Ball," at Michigan and Trumbull. It was symbolic to him. It meant he was still alive,



through  
bifocals  
Fred  
DeLano

still on the job, still healthy enough to maintain a tradition.

"I'm going to get better" were the last words he said from a St. Mary Hospital bed to his friend and pastor, David T. Strong. Eddie went out reluctantly. But in life's late innings, as his hearing and eyesight worsened, it was obvious that time was running out.

Since Eddie's death, many news stories have recounted his achievements and told his popularity as a raconteur who had the

ability to laugh at himself in subtle ways as he recalled the anecdotes of life along a river of printer's ink. He never ran out of tales concerning those he hobnobbed with during the "golden age of sports."

But a couple of yarns have been overlooked. For one, I turn to Sam Hudson's story on Eddie in the April 1975 issue of "The Detroit" magazine.

"IN THE early '30s, Eddie watched tight-fisted Ty Cobb play 'a big overgrown kid' named Babe Ruth in a golf exhibition at Grosse Ile. Both were good golfers. After a 14-hole tie, the match was called because the crowd was getting too large to handle.

"When it came time for them to pay their caddies," Eddie recalls, "I saw Ruth peel off a \$20

bill and give it to his boy. Then I heard Cobb say to his caddie:

"What is the caddie fee for 18 holes?"

"\$1.50," the kid answered.

"Well, we only played 14 holes," said Cobb. "Here's \$1.25."

"Edgar said Cobb was the greatest baseball player he ever saw, and the closest man with a dollar he ever met."

On one of the many, many times Eddie and I sat side by side in the press box at University of Michigan Stadium, memory took him back to the first Michigan football game he ever covered.

JUST THE recollection makes me think, too, of some of those he has joined in what we sometimes jokingly called that "Great Press Box in the Sky." Skilled writers they were, like Harry Salsinger, Sam Greene,

E.A. Batchelor, Bob Murphy, Charley Ward, Doc Greene, Dale Stafford, Hal Middlesworth and more. In fact, now that they're reunited, Batch may already have asked Eddie if he brought a compass. This is why:

It was at old Ferry Field, and Eddie remembered that as he began pecking out a story on the victorious Wolverines he found drama in the way the setting sun glistened off their helmets.

Spontaneously, he asked wizened old Batchelor from Detroit Saturday Night, who was in the next seat, "Is that west?"

I still can hear him chuckling as he repeated Batch's answer, "Son, if it isn't, you've got yourself one hell of a good story."

Rest well, old friend. The dust where you lie will ever be warm.

## Fans trumpet band's upbeat reputation

THE SYMPHONY gets the big bucks and the fundraising marathon, but the Detroit Concert Band continues to draw more national attention. Indeed, Dr. Leonard B. Smith and his polished crew may be more honored outside Motown than inside it.

We band fans will be in our glory from 7-9 p.m. Sunday, June 1. The ABC-TV network (Channel 7 here) will present "The Indomitable Teddy Roosevelt," a documentary on one of our greatest presidents.

The Detroit Concert Band is on the soundtrack for no less than 73 minutes. That's a whole lot better than the Detroit Symphony has been able to do, even when superstar Antal Dorati was in charge.

SUNDAY WILL be one of the few times we can hear the DCB in the summer of '88.

One appearance is scheduled for 8 p.m. July 5 in the outdoor plaza of the Southfield Civic Center. Others are around the state and nation.

Smith cancelled the Belle Isle bandshell concerts in the mid-

1970s after it became painfully obvious Detroit police couldn't control noisy passersby. Detroit's cultural money goes toward rock presentations, which is the city's privilege, I suppose.

And for a variety of reasons, the State Fairgrounds, Birmingham and Livonia aren't on the '86 summer schedule.

YET THE "Teddy" show will have a distinct Michigan flavor. For one thing, the band was taped in the lovely old Redford Theater on Lake at Grand River in my old stomping grounds in northwest Detroit.

There's a story behind it. Producer Harrison Engle wanted Smith to go to Hollywood and use a pickup band to make the soundtrack. Smith held out, bless him, because his own musicians possess what has come to be known as the "Squash quality."

The lapins was done about two years ago. Release of the film was held up until now, however, because producer Engle wanted it shown on network TV in order to get a larger audience.

And the film's narrator will be native Michigander George C. Scott.



Tim  
Richard

WHY THE Detroit Concert Band?

Smith is the direct musical descendant of John Phillip Sousa,

"the March King" of the late 19th and early 20th century, and Edwin Franko Goldman. Sousa played the kind of music that was popular in Teddy's era.

Smith preserves the sound by using Sousa's arrangements and the same kind of cool, classical performing techniques. The Michigan Marching Band is ideal for a football stadium, but for a concert in the park, only the DCB will do, thank you.

The British made the same discovery some years ago when BBC searched the world for a band to play the music for a TV documentary on Sousa. Guess which band was picked.

BESIDES ITS familiar summer park concerts, the Detroit Concert Band makes records — 25 L.P.s.

The recording activity is underwritten by a DCB Society which has paid members in Brit-

ain, Germany, France, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Australia and Japan. You have one guess how much the Michigan Council for the Arts kicks in, and keep your guess very low.

This is not to knock the symphony, which probably deserves a better national reputation than it has been accorded. It is just to say that we Band Fans are on to something, and we don't mind sharing the news.

### Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

### Lend a hand to the MDA

To the editor:

Here's your chance to exercise and help others at the same time. "Workout Day for MDA" is

taking place Sunday, June 8, at the Oakland Community College Campus in Farmington Hills.

You'll have the opportunity to work out with top aerobic instructors.

This exciting event gets started at noon and runs through 3 p.m. It includes a fashion show, refreshments and prizes. Sponsor sheets are available by calling the MDA at 476-2920.

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