

Yashinsky: My Friendship with WXYZ Sports Producer Reggie Hall; And a Video Salute



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I walked into the Channel 7 newsroom in 2003 not really knowing what to expect. Just having finished my freshman year at Michigan, this was probably my first big interview -- for a summer internship in the WXYZ sports department.

Reggie Hall's sports department.

But this wasn't a regular interview. While we talked, a matinee Pistons' game played on one of the many screens in front of us. Very quickly, the "interview" just turned into me and Reggie riffing on sports. Music. Food. But mostly, the Detroit Titans. It was his deepest passion, and thankfully for me and my chances of securing this internship, I'd always followed the U of D hoops club, too. That's all it took. I was in.

That day, our working relationship began, and a couple of years later, the internship would end. But like so many others' stories floating around metro Detroit today, it was not the last of Reggie Hall in my life. I'd been fortunate enough to enter his very wide circle of friends, and I considered it the highest honor to be in that club.

Video: A five-minute WXYZ tribute by colleagues is at the end of this commentary.

Reggie was unlike anyone else. Fiercely passionate, always positive. He did everything with style.

He wouldn't just say, "When do the Detroit Shock play tonight?" He'd ask, "What time we got tonight for the 'Lovely Ladies of Dribble?'" He'd call Swin Cash, "Swinnella." I always wondered if that was her real name or if Reggie just got creative for the sake of making everything a little more fun. In looking it up now, of course it's the latter.

The legendary Diana Lewis would glide out of the studio at 6:30 and immediately pop over to Reggie's neck of the woods. "What are we eating tonight, Reg?"

It was dinnertime and everyone was hungry, so Reggie would pull out the most valuable desk drawer in the whole office, the one holding carryout menus from every restaurant within a 50-mile radius. He'd often treat me, too, and never expected anything in return.

Loved Was (Not Was)



David Was (left) and Joey Yashinsky flank Reggie Hall around 2004.

Reggie wasn't a follower. He was a leader. He liked what he liked, not what everyone else did. Case in point, Reggie was not some ardent follower of Bruce Springsteen, or the Beatles. Instead, he cherished the tunes of Was (not Was), a group that originated out of Detroit, and just so happened to contain my Uncle David as one of its founding members and chief lyricist.

Imagine the excitement on Reggie's face when I showed up to the office with a freshly burned CD, chock full of WNW's best songs, for Reggie to bop around to on his many road trips. Sure enough, he took that CD with him the very next week in taking a trip to Pittsburgh to catch a ballgame. On that trip, someone decided to break into Reggie's car, and grabbed some things, along with his new disc. Maybe they thought they could knock the smile from this guy's face, turn him into a "Woe is me" type-person. Never gonna happen.

Reggie had that special quality of being able to have hundreds of friends in dozens of cities, but somehow, each of us felt like an important part of the big man's life. Those people are rare. Reggie was special. It seems surreal using his name in the past tense.

When my uncle and his band would Walk the Dinosaur into town for a show, Reggie would be the first one I'd call. "We'll leave your name at the door," I'd tell him. I know Reggie loved being on "the list" that the band delivered to the venue. He'd party the night away with our family, meeting most of them only then, but somehow always delivering a certain feeling that he'd been a friend your whole life. When my grandma found herself struggling up the steps after the show, Reggie noticed and hustled over. "I'll be your rail," Reggie bellowed, holding out his arm for her to use for balance.

He wouldn't just say, "Can I help you?" Instead, it's "I'll be your rail."

Even in doing something as mundane as helping an old lady up some stairs, Reggie put his own personal touch on it. I still use that line today.

And as everyone knows, Reggie Hall was a massive supporter and follower of the Detroit Titans. At every home game, you could find Reggie, tucked away in his own corner of Calihan Hall, standing up, imploring his team to take better shots, attack the basket, play solid defense. No matter the performance, Reggie always found the silver lining. If the team lost, they'd win the next time. If a player underperformed, he'd tell you the things they did well. The only gripe Reggie would have is that the rest of the Calihan crowd didn't stand and shout the way he did. When Reggie did something, he did it with the deepest passion, and couldn't understand when others did not follow suit.

It wasn't just the hoops team that Reggie took pride in. I remember times when he'd be tracking U of D golf results online. Or women's tennis. Anything that involved the Titans was something that Reggie was going to follow and root for. That devotion came full circle in 2013 when Reggie was honored, on the court, at a Titans' basketball game. Try and find a bigger smile in the world than Reggie on that night -- you won't.

Loved People

But no matter how many road trips Titan Reggie took to watch his club play, I still think his biggest passion was people. He'd go to Green Bay or Valparaiso or Wright State to see the game, but in each of those places, Reggie had also developed a unique group of friends.

I've been to other cities to watch the Pistons or the Tigers play. I don't emerge from that town with a handful of new buddies. But I'm not Reggie Hall. Nobody is.

A couple of years ago, I penned a column outlining the various types of Lions' fans you will find in the state of Michigan. The article got picked up a few different places and had some of the radio hosts in town using the column's

various characters for a show topic. Before Reggie even got a chance to sit down and read the article, he sent over a note letting me know he heard the article getting "luv" (Reggie's word) on the air.

"Going to go on the site and read it today but just wanted to let you know how proud I am when I hear about my guys doing well. Please tell the fam hello and keep up the great work. Always proud of you."

Seeing "I'm proud of you" from Reggie Hall was the highest honor you could ever hope for.

Every winter, my dad and I seek out a Titan game on the schedule. Usually a weekend afternoon, I never have to call or e-mail Reggie to make sure he'll be there. You just know.

In an arena with plenty of good seats available, my dad, understandably, would always want to sit center court. Get the best view possible. But for me, going to Calihan Hall meant being with Reggie. So naturally, after having the same back-and-forth that we did every year, my dad would begrudgingly grab his coat and we'd go to that same corner, upper level across from the Titans bench, to spend the day with the loudest fan in the building.

He'd always be so happy to see us. The way he'd greet us, give us each a big hug, offer us a drink down at the club, you almost got the sense that we were being welcomed into his home. In a way, we were.

So today just doesn't make any sense. Reggie meant so much to so many people.

The fragility of life is a cold reality that is impossible to wrap your head around.

We're Diminished Now

In going back through "all things Reggie" these last few days, I came across an email from the night he was honored by his beloved U of D.

"There's some video of it on WXYZ. Couldn't believe they sent a crew out to shoot that, but thankful. You know me, not used to all the attention and fanfare. But it was nice to not be the wingman for a moment."

You were right about most things, Reggie, but not about that.

You were not just some wingman. You were the center of people's lives. You deserved every bit of that honor and news coverage, and so, so much more.

The city of Detroit, and so many of our worlds, is a lesser place today.

We lost a great man, with a great laugh, and a great, big heart.

I love you, Reg. We all do.



Reggie Hall (WXYZ photo)

"Reggie was special. It seems surreal using his name in the past tense." (WXYZ photo)

Other tributes are online

► "Rest in Peace Reggie Hall...a big man, a good man, a big heart. His smile, and friendship will never be forgotten." -- **Jim Branstatter**, Detroit Lions radio analyst

- ▶ "Michigan lost a great guy today, the nicest man I've ever met. I couldn't wait to see his name light up on my phone. . . . Reggie's laugh filled a room, his attitude was contagious. . . . He always had the right words." -- **Greg Kampe**, Oakland University basketball coach
- ▶ "Our buddy Reggie Hall is trending in Detroit. He'd laugh to see more people talking about him than Victoria's Secret." -- **Brad Galli**, WXYZ sports anchor and reporter
- ▶ "I may not remember what he said or did, but I will never forget how Reggie Hall made me feel every time I saw him." -- **Jennifer Hammond**, Fox2 News reporter
- ▶ "He was one of the good -- and genuine -- guys in this crazy business." -- **Tony Ortiz**, WWJ and WXYT (97.1 The Ticket)
- ▶ "We've lost one of the good guys." -- **Dave LewAllen**, WXYZ anchor
- ▶ "Summing up nearly 11 years with Reggie by my side can't be done in a few paragraphs, but a few words best crystallize his essence. Loving. Loyal. Passionate. . . .
"My two daughters loved him as Uncle Reggie, and I can't quantify the educational power of his friendship to them – little white girls joyously running into the arms of a huge black man, intimidating in size but not in substance. That's love." -- **Tom Leyden**, Former WXYZ sports director (2004-April 2015; now lead sports anchor In Boston at WFXT (Fox affiliate)
- ▶ "It's a humbling day. Gone too soon, I'll miss you as a coworker, teacher, guide and mostly a friend." -- **Justin Rose**, WXYZ sports reporter
- ▶ "Our condolences to family & friends of Reggie Hall, a WXYZt & Detroit Ttitans icon, and friend to all of us in Detroit sports." -- **Detroit Pistons**, on Twitter
- ▶ "I was with him in person only three times, but felt like I was a friend because of his personality." -- **Tom VanHaaren**, ESPN college football reporter.
- ▶ "I have a huge hole in my heart today. I feel privileged to have known him." -- **Don Shane**, retired WXYZ sports anchor, in Freep (<http://www.freep.com/story/sports/2015/12/09/reggie-hall-wxyz-detroit-titans/77036272/>) interview

Tribute by station colleagues

This is from Wednesday night's 6 p.m. newscast: