

William P. (Hank) O'Donnell 1904 - 1983

"He epitomized all that is good and right in the appellation 'newspaperman.'"

- W. J. Pape

Legendary sports reporter, columnist and editor William P. O'Donnell, known as "Hank," was born in Waterbury, Connecticut on June 21, 1904, one of nine children of Patrick and Margaret Kelly O'Donnell.

His career with the local newspapers began at a very early age, with a paper route that eventually covered a large, lucrative swath of the city's East End. As a teenager, O'Donnell's energy and enthusiasm caught the attention of Dan Parker, sports editor of *The American*. In 1922, Parker, who would later find fame as a New York sports columnist, hired O'Donnell as his assistant at \$18 a week, less than what he had been earning on his paper route. He worked under Parker until 1923, moved to *The Republican* for a short stint as a general news reporter and returned to sports in 1924. He was appointed Sports Editor of *The Republican* later that year, a position he was to hold for more than 35 years. He was named Sports Editor of *The American* in 1959 and became Executive Sports Editor of both newspapers in 1967.

O'Donnell's remarkable career extended some 61 years, almost until the day he died. During those decades, he covered every sort of event, from the earliest years of Yankee Stadium, to the glory days of Yale football, to major boxing matches, the World Series, bowl games, golf tournaments and horse races.

But he was perhaps known most affectionately for his devotion to local events, games, teams and sports personalities. He wrote about the City Amateur Baseball League at Hamilton Park, basketball games at the Field Street Armory, golf matches at the Country Club of Waterbury, and the doings of former city athletes, wherever they roamed.

O'Donnell's column "Hot Off the Keys" became a part of the fabric of life in western Connecticut. For years, he wrote it nearly every day. In those millions of words, he was unfailingly courteous and fair to his subjects and honest with his readers. His Monday column, "The Week's Wash on Monday's Line," was eagerly read for its mentions of all the local people he bumped into amidst his travels around the area during the previous seven days, especially his regular Thursday lunch at The Cave on East Main Street.

In addition to his work for the local papers, O'Donnell was for many years a correspondent for *The Sporting News*, a national sports weekly, and the Litchfield County correspondent for *The New York Times*.

As his career progressed, O'Donnell was duly honored for his contributions to journalism and the local and state sports scene. He was voted "Connecticut Sports Writer of the Year" in 1962, and was honored at a national awards dinner in North Carolina later that year. He was one of the founders of the



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office, including the presidency in 1945. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the National Football Writers Association, an officer in the U.S. Basketball Writers Association and a member of the National Baseball Writers Association. The sports hall of fame at Waterbury Municipal Stadium is named after O'Donnell.

O'Donnell moved to Litchfield in 1935, where he and his wife, Gertrude, raised two sons, William P., Jr. and Gerald. He was also a devoted grandfather of many grandchildren. He was an active member of the community, serving on the Litchfield Board of Education for twelve years, six as President. He was a trustee of St. Anthony of Padua Church and a long-time member of the Knights of Columbus and the Torrington Elks Glee Club.

Upon O'Donnell's death in 1983, newspaper publisher W. J. Pape II summed up the sports writer's career by stating "...a newspaper must be more than paper and ink; otherwise where would we find men like Hank O'Donnell? In 60 years in the newspaper business Hank had seen it all. He epitomized all that is good and right in the appellation