

MATT DOBEK SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD



TOM KOWALSKI

Some saw Tom Kowalski as gruff; a bit intimidating at times. But what one always got from Kowalski was honesty. There was no fluff, no hidden agendas. Kowalski went for the jugular when he dug for a story and when the story was finished you knew it came from the heart. He had a passion for sports and there was never any question where Kowalski stood on any topic.

Kowalski, whose nickname was “Killer”, covered the Detroit Lions for 30 years, first with the Oakland Press and then with Booth Newspapers. His work with Lions broadcaster Dan Miller on FOX 2 and his guest appearances on WDFN AM 1130 brought Kowalski closer to his readers and added a face and a voice to a longtime beat reporter who loved his job.

Kowalski died on Aug. 29, 2011 at age 51.

Oakland Press sports reporter Paula Pasche was deeply saddened, as many were, by Kowalski’s death. Pasche said the two started at the Oakland Press at the same time, 1978, and that it was Kowalski who showed her the ropes when Pasche moved to the sports department in the late 80s.

“He was a close friend of mine, almost like a big brother,” Pasche said. “We were neighbors for many years and played many rounds of golf. He made me a better person and I miss him every day.”

Kowalski won many awards and this year he’s a finalist for the Professional Football Writers Association’s McCann Award which is presented to a reporter who has made a long and distinguished contribution to pro football through coverage. He was a voting member for the Pro Football Hall of Fame and since his passing the media rooms at the Lions’ Allen Park facility have been named in his honor.

Born and raised in Farmington, Kowalski played basketball growing up and competed in a number of Gus Macker 3-on-3 tournaments.

But Kowalski found his niche writing and talking about sports.

“He was a writer from the day he was born,” his sister Carol Kowalski said. “He always had to have a newspaper. He went to the hospital one time and he made sure we brought him a newspaper to read.

“He had an awesome sense of humor. He was always a skinny kid and I used to beat him up. Then he got older. I was into sports too, and one time we were playing football on the front lawn and there was about an inch of snow on the ground; that wet kind. By the time we got done all of the grass was gone. He got in trouble for that. He was older.”

Kowalski earned the respect from his peers through his straight-forward reporting style. More times than not his would be the first question presented at a news conference.

Miller began working with Kowalski in ‘97 and it was Kowalski who made helped Miller ease his way into the Detroit sports scene.

“He was a guy you had to get to know,” Miller said. “He was the perfect mix of arrogance and humility. Everything was open with him. Tom did his job. He had this look that said, ‘I have something to say and you had better listen’.

“If you had all of his charisma and personality, and didn’t have the information, it wouldn’t work. He was a natural. He was engaging. He was knowledgeable. But he was also like that guy on that corner stool in a bar. He was approachable. That was his charm.

“He cared about his job, covering the Lions. He was competitive. With all of the beat writers in town, you had to be competitive.”

For his intense dedication, devotion, and service to sports, the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame proudly presents its 2012 Matt Dobek Special Recognition Award to Tom Kowalski.

