

The Champ Is Gone, But . . .

The way it was around our office at 5:51 p.m. yesterday was just like it must have been everywhere in the world where free men live and where so many now live only to be free. For he was one of us.

Somehow or other, if you were in sports, you never thought of him so much as connected with the high office which he held.



Rather, you remembered him most the way he'd chuckle, getting ready to throw out the first ball to open the baseball season. Or how he'd sit on the 50 at the Army-Navy game, in the days when the Army-Navy game was only as grim as football.

You'd remember his voice when you heard the flash of his death and you'd never forget that night at Chautauqua when you were a city editor, listening to him throw his words against that upstate political sounding-board and hear them come back again and again and again:

"I hate war!"

And that was before the men who hated him turned both those phrases into catchwords and tried to throw them into his face, hoping to blind the people who put him where he was. They didn't fool him—or the people.

You remember how only as far back as Washington's Birthday you were on the platform with Mrs. Roosevelt and you still feel the warmth of her handshake and the sincerity with which she offered that same hand to Joe Louis, the one-time cotton picker.

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You remembered how, with The Champ showing the way at Casablanca, Teheran, and Yalta, you felt awfully silly punching at these same keys about Branch Rickey's latest troubles in Brooklyn. Or Mel Ott's headaches with the Giants. Or all of baseball's gigantic worries about whether they'd get a green light—and have manpower enough, afterwards—to play in '45.

You remembered how, in the twilight at the Polo Grounds, a game was halted while the loud speakers piped his voice to the filled stands, and how matches flickered in the dark and not a sound was heard as he gave one of his reports to the Nation.

You remembered as late as only yesterday, when the Red Cross ambulances wheeled the lame and the halt, carrying their wounds from the far-off battlelines, into the Stadium to see a ball game in the bright afternoon sun. And you realize that The Champ had been that way himself, all through his public life.

You remembered sitting on the stool in the Flatbush coffee pot one night, arguing—or mostly listening, because you were among Dodger fans—about that very day's game. And then the radio came on with his preparedness speech and his warning of the things that were then yet to come. And you suddenly realize now that it was the only time you ever heard any one man's voice stop a baseball argument in Brooklyn.

You remember last Fall, in the drizzle and the rain, how you got yourself all bundled up and gathered up your three kids and perched them along the line of march where his campaign caravan came from Brooklyn to New York.

And how you shivered from the rain and the cold, but he went bareheaded through it all.

And you remember, after that campaign, that you had the first chance to meet Governor Dewey at

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the Boxing Commission's party where they announced a new State Chairman and the Gov. looked fit and hearty after his long vacation and rest after the strenuous campaign. By that time, The Champ was winging to Yalta, I suppose. Or somewhere such, getting on with the job to be done.

You remember how, when he got back from over there, he took time out to shake hands with Clark Griffith, owner of the Washington Senators, and to accept, for himself and his wife, the gold-edged season passes for 1945 to Griffith Stadium.

"And it isn't beyond the realm of human possibility that I might get out to your opener this year, Griff," he said. And added: "If all goes well."

I know you're not supposed to quote directly the President of the United States, but the hell with press club protocol on that one.

And you remember the faces of your kids when you told them that he was indeed dead and they couldn't say a word. Not even the one who, last election time, explained to some of her playmates what F. D. R. stood for.

"Why everybody knows that," she said, loftily. "Franklin Democracy Roosevelt, of course!"

She wasn't kidding.

—JOE CUMMISKEY



Friday, April 13, 1945

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