

(Close to) 10 Observations about Reuben Frank

Erin Steffe

Reuben Frank likes his iced tea black -- no sweetener, no flavoring, not even a slice of lemon. His favorite NFL stadium is CenturyLink Field. When he isn't rotating between sports complexes in South Philadelphia, he's probably at a concert or running, a pastime he's enjoyed since his days running high school track. Another thing that has always come naturally to him? Writing.

Now a Philadelphia Eagles beat reporter for NBC Sports Philadelphia, a position he's held since 2010, Frank has covered uncountable losses, Terrell Owens drama, and several championship games. He's even reported on 30 consecutive Penn Relays, and all of these experiences have helped bolster his reputation as a sports journalist.

From writing concert and album reviews for his New York high school, to columns on politics and college affairs at Ohio Wesleyan University, writing about sports never crossed Frank's mind. That is, until he earned his first job in 1982 working for the now-defunct Gloucester County Times in Woodbury, NJ.

"I was always a sports fan, but it never really occurred to me that I could write about sports," said Frank. "I thought I was going to be doing investigative reports and covering politics."

Three years later, Frank found himself working for the Burlington County Times, a place he called home for 25 years.

At both newspapers, Frank gained experience covering high school sports and immersed himself in a variety of work that set him up for his next role. Frank credits several colleagues with helping him along the way, most notably Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Phil Sheridan.

"[Sheridan] said to me 'Do you want to cover the Eagles?' At that point I had never gone to a game and hardly watched football," said Frank. "It seemed like a good opportunity and I said I would do it."

Shortly after, Frank became a beat reporter covering the Eagles. In September 2010, he continued this role when Comcast SportsNet Philadelphia (now known as NBC Sports Philadelphia) hired him mid-season.

In addition to his guest appearances and radio hosting experience on 94.1 WIP, this is where Frank began to make a name for himself. It's also when he met his longtime friend and colleague Geoff Mosher.

"He was already the main Eagles reporter at Comcast SportsNet when he advocated for them to hire me as 'Eagles Insider,' a really prominent job," said Mosher. "I don't know how many beat reporters would advocate for their company to hire another one, so that says a lot about Reuben's lack of an ego."

Since joining NBC Sports Philadelphia, Frank has watched his storytelling change dramatically.

"Jobs now don't even resemble what my job used to be," said Frank. "Stories are shorter, and there are lots of lists and personality put into it, which we never did. I never write features about players anymore. It's more like 'Here are 5 reasons why Jordan Matthews helps the Eagles.' It has changed the way we cover teams."

Long gone is the time when communities would read the results of a game the next morning in the paper. Frank altered his writing style to appeal to an immediacy-driven society, resulting in arguably his most well-known work: Roob's 10 Observations.

"It's one of the hardest things I've ever done," said Frank. "It was born out of analytics."

That's no surprise, considering Frank is a statistics guru. He's known to reference trends and numbers in his writing and especially in his tweets.

"Reuben is the king of researching statistics and historical trends," said Mosher. "He would shuffle through his Bible of Eagles notes to research stats that nobody else would have. It has, and always will, set him apart from pretty much anyone on the Eagles beat."

Roughly three years ago, Frank discovered that stories did well within the first hour after a game. He approached his boss and asked if he could try writing a piece during the game and file it as soon as the game ended.

"I am making changes, deleting and adding up points up until the last minute," said Frank. "It's stressful when it comes down to overtime and tie games with a minute remaining. It's a lot of deep breaths, but it's fun."

Roob's 10 Observations has been a source of creativity, something he appreciates since the industry has evolved. And for someone who has covered a beat as long as he has, you would think there isn't much he hasn't seen or learned.

Maybe that's true, at least inside the realm of journalism...

"[I taught him] how to drive, hopefully," Mosher said with a laugh. "He's got some of the strangest start-stop tendencies when he's behind the wheel. Also, I think I taught him that "Mos Def" isn't just a phrase but also a hip-hop artist. Anything else, I'm not sure. It's hard for the pupil to teach anything to the Professor Emeritus."

But even for Frank, covering a beat doesn't come without its challenges.

"I never had writer's block," Frank said with a laugh. "I just write. But in all seriousness, it's hard to get stuff that nobody else has," said Frank. "My job evolved to being less interview-based, which solves the problem in itself. Quotes become so overrated. Write your story you want to write."

For the amount of time Frank has spent in the industry, there are bound to be memories that stand out to him. Indeed there's one. It stems from when the Eagles signed Michael Vick after his release from prison in 2009.

"It was almost ten years ago this week, actually," Frank recalled. "I asked [Vick] about his first Thanksgiving out of prison. We ended up talking for half an hour. At one point, he looked me in the eye and said 'If I had to do it all over again, I would go back to prison, because I'm a much better person now than when I went there.' That was a powerful moment. That was the moment I realized how much he changed."

On top of this special moment, Frank cherishes the relationships he's developed.

"I'm blessed to have worked with the people I have," said Frank. "I don't want to let them down. They're motivators and my best friends in the world."

And the sentiment appears to be mutual...

"He's an everyday person and doesn't pretend to be any different. He's a hair-on-fire kind of guy," said Mosher. "And you definitely learn a lot about music, whether you want to or not. He has endless stories of concerts he's attended."