Benjamin Thomas

Feature: Berry Tramel

Headline: Berry Tramel, a Sports Hall of Famer

When a paper, who has printed papers every day for 120 years straight, ends its streak and doesn’t print, you have seen it all.

Berry Tramel, an Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame inductee, is someone whose seen it all. The highs and the lows of sports in Oklahoma since he joined the sports journalism industry at just 17. Growing up in Norman, Oklahoma, Tramel fell in love with sports at a young age and realized early on a passion for sports writing after his dad would hand him stacks of newspapers to read. Tramel always loved sports and while his athletic abilities were poor, he used that love of sports to dive into writing and at 17 years old, not even in college, walked into the Norman Transcript looking to get started.

“Listen I got a part time job opened, not very glamourous, a lot of taking phone calls, a lot of covering events no one wants to cover, writing headlines, helping out in the office but I need somebody if you want the job, you can have it.”

That was the phone call Tramel received shortly after that same guy, Jim Weekes, told him to go to college to become a writer. Tramel had his foot in the door doing what he was passionate about, and he took off running, not looking back for the next 13 years. By the time of his departure in 1991 from the Norman Transcript to the Oklahoman, he had become the sports editor for the Norman Transcript and now has spent 30 years at the Oklahoman, covering the biggest sports moments, athletes, teams and sporting events in Oklahoma.

“When people ask what’s my most important story... this is what I give them.”

From covering the Oklahoma City Thunder to Oklahoma football, Tramel has been able to interact with athletes, and fans from all over the state, country and world. But one of his most prestigious stories doesn’t come from professional athletes like Russell Westbrook or icons like Howard Schnellenberger, or even George W. Bush, his best story came from a small Oklahoma town called Lonewolf.

A small town in Oklahoma, Tramel had received word of a meeting happening about the safety of athletics due to a basketball player in the town being HIV positive. Teams would forfeit games against Lonewolf due to this issue and it began to affect more than just the boys' basketball team. After the meeting didn’t resolve anything, Tramel was asked by the mother of the story to write a piece on her son. Tramel went down to Lonewolf and interviewed the kid.

“Her son was born with hemophilia, which is the blood disease where your bloods really thin and needed a transfusion within a year or so of his birth. It was back before the tested for tainted blood, and the blood had HIV in it, now he’s HIV positive.”

What Tramel learned in the piece was that the kid, who didn’t even see the court except for in the warmup lines, has had this his entire life. So, after the interview, Tramel can share this boy's story and facts to back it up which helped resolve the issue. He sees this as a prime example of how Journalists and what you write can influence society and is a story, he is still proud of to this day.

Now at 60 years of age, covering a pro sports market along with collegiate athletics, Tramel continues to pursue his passion and doesn’t see himself leaving the sports industry anytime soon.

“Let me get to 80, I’ll walk away without problems.”