

"Hey Rob - we need a front-page photo - fast"

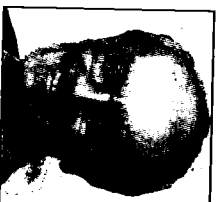
Rob Beintema never looked like he was working hard, even when he was, says John Stewart.
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The true test of a skilful newspaper photographer is not the celebration after the winning goal is scored, the scattered road remnants of a bad collision or the disappointment

of an athlete caught at the peak moment of fatigue and despair, wiping away tears as a gallant effort falls short.

The true test of a skilful newspaper photographer is a dim school gym where a dozen dignitaries, one gigantic cheque and 400 kids await. The shouting, jostling kids (and several dignitaries) expect to be plastered on page 1. Enter the professional.

Over almost four decades working with Rob Beintema, I've seen dozens of variations of this theme and marvelled as Photographer-General Beintema takes command of the battleground.



JOHN STEWART
Column

He snaps a few obligatory, politically correct 'let's get everybody in this one' shots, which will be summarily deleted later. Then he sets the frame of essential booties, twisted and cajoled into intriguing angles. He'll model the setup himself, mugging outrageously as he projects an elbow, eliciting laughter and evaporating stress.

He takes a few 'samples' until everyone's comfortable, cracks a joke that initiates natural across-the-board smiles. In the next second - bang - the job is done before anyone realizes they've just been brilliantly massaged into another Rob photo transforming the mundane into the memorable.

Sometimes, it's even different enough to make page 1 and receives the ultimate honour, yellowing for years under a fridge magnet.

That's the art of the press photographer, an art slowly dying as the Rob Beintemas and Fred Looks of this world leave our newsrooms.

Loek, Beintema's comrade-in-camera until his death in 2015, always called Rob the best. Beintema has just retired after nearly four decades. He's the last full-time employee from The Mississauga Times, which merged with The News in 1981.

Thankfully, a new full-time photographer is being hired to try to replace Rob. Maybe there's hope for our industry yet.

Part of Beintema's skill set is his nonchalance, which has relaxed innumerable subjects and infuriated innumerable editors. He never looked like he was working hard, even when he was.

The words Beintema dreaded most were: "We need a front page," usually issued last-second, on deadline.

He always managed to miraculously come back with one.

What makes a real pro is his internal standard.

"Every day is different," he says. "It's very creative because it's all on you. Whatever you bring back from any job - it's all on you."

Rob's incredibly consistent work over decades of Santa Claus parades, sports dinners and Rotary cheque presentations prove excellence is in the adventurous eye of the skilled shooter.

— John Stewart is a retired longtime journalist with the Mississauga News. His column, My Back Pages, appears each week.