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Ron Green's funeral fitting tribute to a local legend

BY SCOTT FOWLER
sfowler@charlotteobserver.com



Ron Green's funeral began Monday afternoon in Charlotte with the national anthem. It was a fitting tribute to the longtime local sports columnist, and not just because he once



Ron Green

served in the U.S. Army. The afternoon started with The Star-Spangled Banner because Green had asked long ago for it to be played at his funeral, figuring it was the song he had heard more than any other. After all, it preceded thousands of sporting events he covered in a remarkable journalism career. Green was 95 when he died on Sept. 18, and his was a life well-lived.

Ron and his wife, Beth, were married for 68 years until she passed away on Oct. 1, 2023 at age 89. Once you knew the two of them, it was hard to think about one without the other. And so it makes sense they were apart for less than a year after being married for nearly seven decades. They had three children (Ron Jr., Dave and Edie) and five grandchildren. The grandkids were doted on in all the ways grandchildren should be, and Ron and Beth were perfect for each other. Ron wrote about

sports for a living, and Beth made everything else work. As Ron Green Jr. mentioned in his eulogy about his father Monday, it was Beth who ran the household and its finances. Ron Sr., on the other hand, never figured out the vagaries of an ATM card. In his wallet he carried a single blank check, folded in half, in case he needed some money. But man, could he ever write. Green was a well-established legend by the time I started at The Charlotte Observer in 1994. His annual Thanksgiving col-

umn exuded gratitude and wonder with the purity of a 5-year-old waking up on Christmas morning. His columns from the Masters every year blessed his readers with richly evocative prose. Nine days into my new job, I picked up the newspaper and saw these two sentences in a Green column from Augusta National: "The back nine at Augusta National is Eden with flagsticks, all pine and azaleas and dogwoods and rambling creeks and little ponds and memories and promises. This is where you go to feel the embrace of the Masters before the battle starts, to see the beauty, to know the peril, to look for ghosts, to listen for echoes." Those weren't even the *first* two sentences. That was Green improvising deep in a column for the fun of it, just because he

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BRAD REMPEL USA TODAY Sports

Charlotte Hornets guard LaMelo Ball dribbles against the Minnesota Timberwolves in the fourth quarter at Target Center in Minneapolis on Jan. 22.

Hornets' LaMelo Ball faces questions in Year 5

BY RODERICK BOONE
roboone@charlotteobserver.com

Rather than elaborating and getting overly in depth about any personal goals for the upcoming season, LaMelo Ball chose to keep it simple. Really simple. "Pretty much just go out there and stay healthy for real," the Charlotte Hornets' star point guard said Monday during the team's media day. "If I'm healthy, I'm straight." That's Ball in a nutshell. He's never too chatty publicly, especially when it comes to discussing himself, and doesn't offer up a diatribe about any-

thing. But even the 23-year-old can't be impervious to the obvious: he's in dire need of a bounce back and reverting to the form that propelled him among the NBA's elite floor generals. This is a big season for Ball, one that could have significant ramifications on his future in Charlotte, multiple sources have told The Observer. He's entering the initial year of the first max rookie contract extension in team history, a stern reminder of just how much talent he possesses. Having the most lucrative deal in the 36 years of pro basketball's existence in Charlotte — and most expensive in the

city's history — comes with an unmistakable amount of responsibility. That's just a part of reality that began when the ink dried on Ball's five-year deal, which could be worth as much as \$260 million. The Hornets desperately hope Ball's injury woes are behind him and he can catapult himself into that elite stratosphere again. "Yeah, Melo, he is in a really good place from a health standpoint," said Jeff Peterson, the Hornets' president of basketball operations. "He's had a really, really good summer as well and it's been neat to see his commitment level. He loves Charlotte and he stayed in Charlotte

basically the whole time, which is great. "He's put the time in, not only on the court, but in the weight room and training room. He's in a really good place. I'm excited. I didn't get to see him play last year when I was here. He was out. So, I'm excited to get to see him and take the next steps." Particularly without any pain in his troublesome ankles. At least that's the plan, anyway. To assist in keeping Ball on the court and off the daily injury report, the two sides apparently finally found a happy medium regarding some protective equipment. As Miles Bridges noted to The Observer leading into training camp, Ball is already wearing ankle braces and has utilized them for a good part of their recent offseason workouts and pickup games.

SEE HORNETS, 8B

Helene damage could affect NC prep playoff schedule

BY LANGSTON WERTZ JR.
lwertz@charlotteobserver.com

Eight years ago, the N.C. High School Athletic Association pushed back the start of its football playoffs due to Hurricane Matthew. NCHSAA commissioner Que Tucker said that could be a possibility again this year after the devastation brought to the western part of the state by Hurricane Helene. Tucker said any decisions about the playoffs would come from the NCHSAA Board of Directors, which she expects will meet via Zoom sometime later this week. "With the devastation they have had," Tucker said Monday. "I'm not sure one week would do it. But that's a decision that has to be made by our board members. As a staff we want to huddle up and look at what we have found and see what we can come up with to present to the board, but we want to make sure our board members (from the regions most affected) can be on the Zoom with us because they have boots-on-the-ground knowledge, and we need to get their perspective." Tucker said in her talks with coaches and athletic officials in the mountains that the damage is excessive and that schools in all four of the NCHSAA's classes have been affected. So the association will not be able to delay one or two classifications in the playoffs, she said. Tucker also doesn't expect that many football games, or any sports, will be played in that region this week. She noted she saw a photograph of the football field at Morganton's Freedom High School showing it almost completely submerged. "Even if we thought one school could play, well, who would they be playing?" Tucker asked. "How can they get there?"

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