



'Don't Make Me Cry, Roy, Adventures in Interviewing'

Roy Firestone • Magic Turtle Press

In the foreword of Roy Firestone's latest book (written with Scott Ostler) is a quote from the late Jim Murray, a Pulitzer Prize winning sports columnist icon with the L.A. Times. "Roy Firestone is the best interviewer I ever saw. That's not sports interviewer. That's interviewer, period." In that vein, "Don't Make Me Cry, Roy, Adventures in Interviewing" is among my favorite all-time sports books and, yet, it's hardly about sports.

Among other themes, Firestone's book is about fathers and sons, and battling overwhelming hardships to achieve greatness. It's whimsical, opinionated, funny and very moving. (Did I mention I like this book?)

The title comes from the 1996 movie "Jerry Maguire" in which Firestone had a cameo role. But to sports fans Firestone was already famous. From 1977 to 1985 he was the sports anchor for KCBS-TV. From 1980-1990, he was the host of ESPN's "Up Close." He won seven Emmy's and seven Cable Ace Awards. (Did I mention he's been fairly successful?)

Firestone has interviewed over 5,000 sports stars and other celebrities. (When does he sleep?) About 25 of those have cried on the show. This created the mythical image that Roy Firestone was the Barbara Walters of sports, an expert in eliciting tears.

Back to "Jerry Maguire." At a crucial moment in the movie, pro football wide receiver Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding, Jr.) goes on "Up Close." He warns Roy that he's not going cry. Naturally, he winds up bawling like a baby. In real life, he wound up winning an Oscar for that role and years later gratefully told Firestone he owed it all to him. (Which almost brought Firestone to tears.)

The irony of the title "Don't Make Me Cry, Roy," is the reader can't help but shed a few tears. The childhood obstacles many of these athletes faced, the sacrifices they made, and once successful, their efforts to create a better world for others, can tug at the heartstrings. Firestone's book

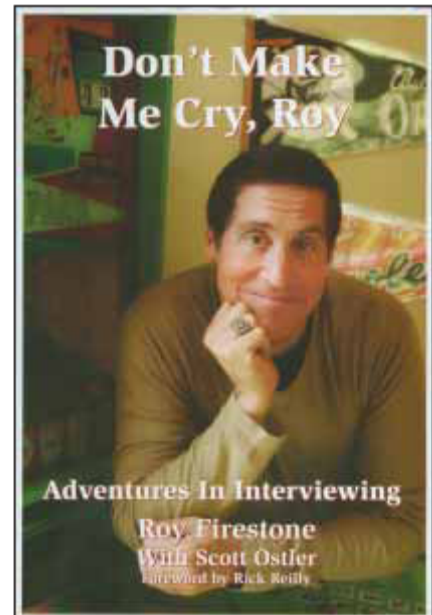
is like going back in time to a more innocent era.

When I was boy the sports page was filled with stories and statistics of my heroes. Today, the sports page is filled with DUIs, weapons charges, sexual abuse, dog fighting and steroid scandals. (And that could all be in one day.) Firestone is not oblivious to this reality. He even has a chapter entitled, "Bores and Bad Boys." But the many inspiring stories far overshadow the negative ones.

Among the most inspiring is the chapter about famed basketball player, Dikembe Mutombo, "A True Warrior." As Firestone says, "When I die I just hope I'm not standing in the line at the Pearly Gates behind Dikembe Mutombo, because that would be one tough act to follow." Many athletes get involved in charities but Mutombo is trying to save an entire country! (The Congo.) "The idea is impossible and insane," Firestone writes, "but Dikembe doesn't care," Through his contributions (and nagging fellow NBA stars) Mutombo actually built a hospital in the Congo. Not a room or a wing, but an entire hospital! There hasn't been a new hospital in the Congo in 40 years. That is, until Dikembe showed up.

The chapter on Andre Agassi, "The Giant," is equally uplifting. The world-class tennis player turned into a world-class mensch. During the past 15 years he's raised \$75,000,000 for "at risk" kids in Las Vegas. Dikembe built a hospital, Andre built a school. (In June, the Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy celebrates its first high school graduation with a 100 percent graduation rate! And 76 percent of those are already accepted at four-year colleges and universities!!)

Magic Johnson ("I Believe in Magic") shares a story with Roy about a kids' TV program on AIDS. Magic asked a 9-year-old girl with HIV what she wanted people to understand. The young girl burst into tears, as did Magic, as did the entire set. Magic was still embracing her



when they went to commercial.

"Super Man," written the night Christopher Reeve died, is Firestone's touching letter to his children about his friend's bravery. Reeve was absolutely a super man.

Firestone skillfully balances emotions with humor. "Help! Is It 'Streaming or Gleaming?'" is about his anxiety over possibly forgetting the lyrics to the "Star Spangled Banner." ("A song that," comedian Robert Klein jokes, "no matter how low you start you end up honking like a goose.") Roy sang it at the Sept. 11 Redskins-Bears game in front of 80,000 fans, including his 15-year-old son. Pressure anyone?

In a great interview, the audience gets to know the interviewee on a human level. Firestone has brought that art to this book. The list of fascinating people we "get to know" includes: Bill Walton, Bobby Knight, Lance Armstrong, Barry Bonds, Mark Cuban, Phil Mickelson, Ted Williams, John Wooden and Paul McCartney!

Did I mention I like this book?

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