

Opinion: Trump's war on the Press won't end well

By Carl Golden

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In baseball lingo, the high, inside fastball is known as the brushback, a tactic to inform the batter that he'd better be cautious about digging in.

The higher and tighter inside fastball is call head-hunting, a serious escalation of the fear tactic and infinitely more perilous.

In spending the first 18 months of his administration accusing the media of "fake news" and deliberate dishonesty, President Trump has been throwing brushback pitches, warning reporters they'd better mend their ways or face consequences.

By ratcheting up the rhetoric to characterize the media as "an enemy of the people" and suggest reporters are unpatriotic, the president has gone for head-hunting, signaling to the media that he wants them out of the game entirely.

If history is any guide, Trump is engaged in a fight he'll lose.

The relationship between the Trump Administration and the media long ago surpassed the normal tensions that have always existed between the elected and those assigned to record, parse and analyze their every move, comment and action.

Presidents have historically groused about the media, complaining about what they perceived as biased and unfair coverage colored by partisan sympathies on the part of reporters. President Eisenhower, perhaps the most beloved of all modern-day chief executives, sent delegates into a fist shaking uproar at the 1964 Republican national convention with his reference to "sensation seeking columnists and commentators."

President Nixon despised the press, and his erstwhile Vice President Spiro Agnew enraptured partisan audiences with his colorful and alliterative assaults on the media.

Despite this history, all concerned moved on, grudges faded away and animosities buried. Cooler heads prevailed and, while the slights inflicted may not have been totally forgotten, it was in the best interests and professional obligations of both sides to concentrate on their duties.

All that went before, though, seems tame next to the naked antagonism and rancor that has come to mark the daily interaction between the Trump administration and the media.

The hardcore base supporting the president shows up at his rallies to roar approval for his ridicule of the media and gleefully join in derisive chants aimed at reporters.

White House press briefings have deteriorated into loud and bitter arguments rather than civil exchanges designed to elicit information for readers and viewers.

One reporter, CNN White House correspondent Jim Acosta, stomped out of a recent briefing in a childish snit because he couldn't get an answer he wanted. He later suggested that reporters protest by marching on Pennsylvania Avenue outside the White House - a truly absurd notion that would play directly into the [resident's hands. (A "Trump Unfair To Reporters" poster won't elicit much sympathy.)

Acosta, by his behavior - shouting questions, interrupting the press secretary mid-response, giving speeches and opinions rather than asking questions while playing to the camera - has become the stereotype of the obnoxious, overbearing, insufferable reporter Trump loves to lampoon. Sadly, he's not alone.

Acosta's right to display all those qualities is Constitutionally protected and he successfully hides any self-embarrassment he may feel.

The President is clearly convinced his disdain for the media is paying off handsomely politically and, being his own best advisor, is not about to change his approach.

However, in the long run it's a losing strategy.

He still must deliver for the American people solutions to those issues that matter most to them - the economy, job creation, immigration, government spending, crime and public safety, among others.

Running from rally to rally bellowing "fake news" to adoring audiences can only carry him so far.

The media will endure as it always has. It is not about to be cowed into silence or submission in the face of threats or obstacles thrown into its path. The media can play the long game; Trump cannot.

At the same time, reporters such as Acosta must keep their composure, avoid the temptation to respond in kind to the President's taunts, and remember who they serve. Acosta's antics only detract from their mission and make fulfilling it all the more difficult.

Trump will undoubtedly continue to throw brushback pitches and go headhunting. Reporters must remember to duck when necessary but be unafraid to dig in and wait for a pitch to hit.

Trump will become arm weary for certain and overstay his time on the mound.

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