

## GUEST COLUMN

# Mitch Henck: Garvey was a fighter and a character

*February 26, 2017*

“I’m Ed Garvey and I’m the new talk show host in the Mitch Henck time slot.”

The playful Ed Garvey was filling in as my guest host on WIBA-AM (1310) so I could play in a charity golf tournament. A business owner called the receptionist right away and said he wanted to pull all his ads off the air if Garvey is the host.

Garvey, of course, said he was teasing and proceeded to interview some of his progressive friends on the show, which confounded my conservative audience. I used to enjoy that.

The labor and civil rights lawyer and progressive activist died last week at the age of 76, but Garvey really knew how to live. He was an Irishman who enjoyed a good fight, and fight he did. A native of Burlington, Garvey was already fighting as a leader of the high school student government. He thought disciplinary problems should be handled in student court. The faculty disagreed.

His outlook changed at UW-Madison in the late '50s and early '60s.

“I came from a city of about 5,000 at the time and went to a university of 40,000. I saw a whole range of things in society I never knew existed,” Garvey said in 2010.

After graduation, Garvey soon became involved in civil rights as a national leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Ed took part in lunch counter sit-ins in black-only restaurants in the South, even though police said white students were forbidden from doing that.

“I never looked at German shepherds the same way again,” Garvey said.

He said on my radio show years later that he and other young activists wanted to do more direct-action protests. But African-American elders would tell them to slow down to avoid more lynchings. After his civil rights days in the '60s, Garvey became an established labor lawyer and directed the NFL Player’s Union from 1971 to 1983. After two years as deputy attorney general in Wisconsin, Garvey ran for U.S. Senate in 1986. He lost a close race to Republican Robert Kasten.

When Garvey was rumored to be considering a race for governor in 1998, I asked him if the rumors were true. He said he was leaning in that direction. "If I run, it'll be balls out, no special interest money," he said. When he ran, he didn't accept donations of more than \$100.

When the race drew closer, I asked him during a round of golf at his home course, "Can I say, "Democratic candidate for governor and Blackhawk Country Club member Ed Garvey?" He bellowed out a colorful expletive in my direction.

He was fun. During Election Night coverage in 1996, Garvey was the Democratic analyst opposite Republican Ody Fish, as I was moderating on WMTV-TV (Ch. 15). I announced on air that my old colleague from a Green Bay television station, Jay Johnson, was running against David Prosser for Congress. Garvey said: "Well, obviously working with you was his first mistake, but hopefully he can overcome that."

During his campaign for governor, if Garvey didn't like his coverage by Ch. 15, he would send me feisty letters to express his irritation. I would get my back up and return fire at times, but in the end all was forgiven. Garvey went on to establish Fighting Bob Fest and Fightingbob.com.

He was respected greatly by the likes of repeated BobFest speakers Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Jim Hightower of Texas. And he was friends with filmmaker Michael Moore, civil rights icon Jesse Jackson and long-time Madison attorney and veteran political operative Bill Dixon.

Republican and former TV co-pundit Bill Kraus was very fond of Garvey. "We disagreed on a lot of things, but we were never disagreeable," Kraus said.

I can remember Ed expressing displeasure at the Wisconsin Democratic Party for being too close to big money interests. He fought for public financing of campaigns. He fought for humane treatment of prisoners at the original Wisconsin Supermax prison in Boscobel. As an authorized legal officer in the review of the prison, Garvey was entitled to a fee for his services but didn't ask for any.

Garvey was a proud family man who fought for the rights of his developmentally disabled daughter. He was a lifelong progressive activist who talked the talk and walked the walk for what he believed.

Ed was a unique character who was so good at golf he won the Wisconsin amateur for 16-and-under boys in 1956. I once shared with him that a local pro told me I should feel like I had spaghetti arms when swinging the club. He beamed later, saying the spaghetti-arms thing was really working for him.

I'm really going to miss Ed Garvey.

*Mitch is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic.  
The Mitch Henck Show is broadcast live 8-11a.m. Monday-Friday at [www.madisontalks.com](http://www.madisontalks.com).*

*Watch Mitch's Daily Video Blog, "Two Minutes with Mitch," weekdays at [madison.com](http://madison.com).*

*Contact Mitch at: [mhenck61@gmail.com](mailto:mhenck61@gmail.com)*