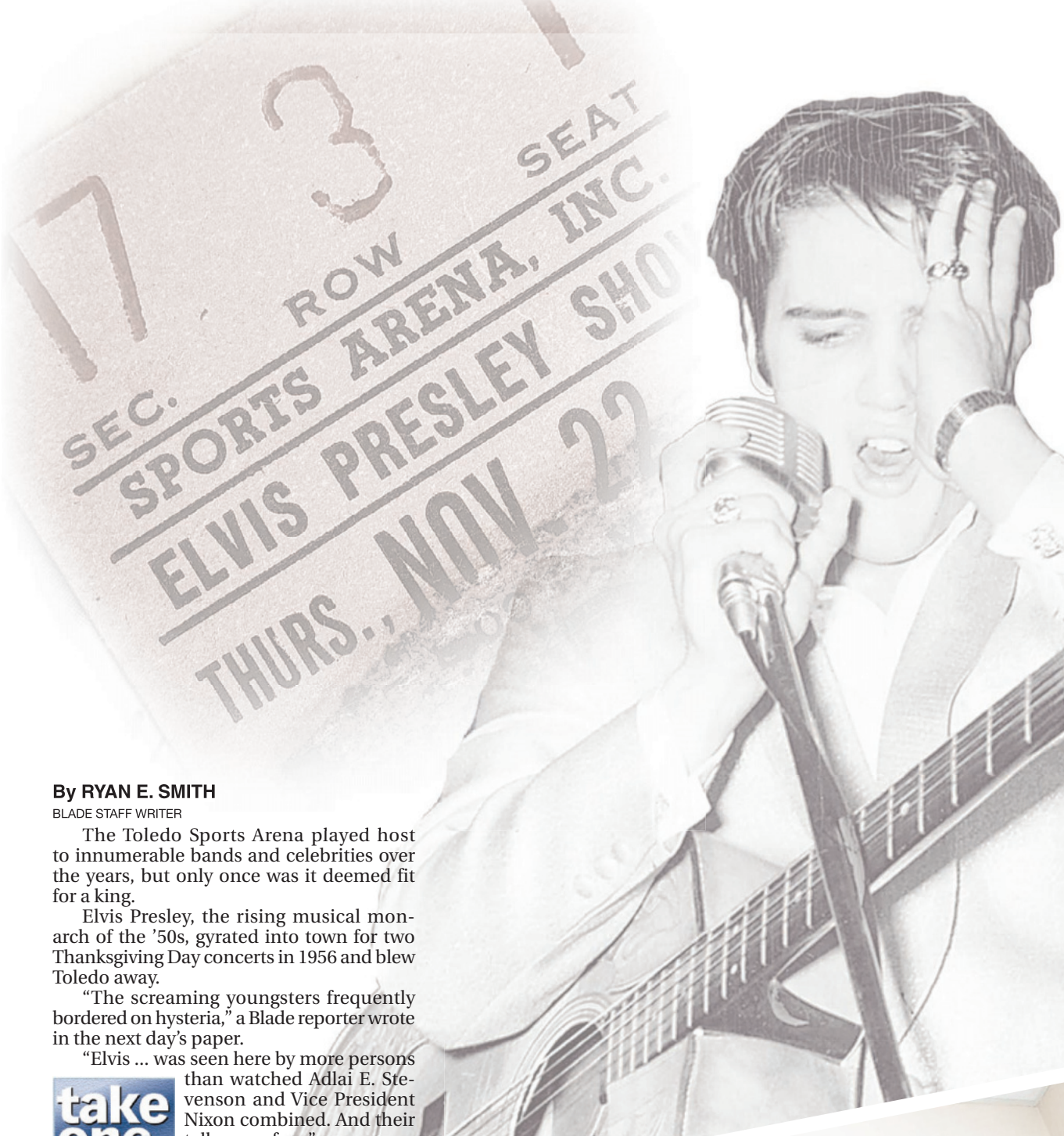


NOV. 22, 1956:

# ELVIS WAS KING AT THE SPORTS ARENA



By RYAN E. SMITH  
BLADE STAFF WRITER

The Toledo Sports Arena played host to innumerable bands and celebrities over the years, but only once was it deemed fit for a king.

Elvis Presley, the rising musical monarch of the '50s, gyrated into town for two Thanksgiving Day concerts in 1956 and blew Toledo away.

"The screaming youngsters frequently bordered on hysteria," a Blade reporter wrote in the next day's paper.

"Elvis ... was seen here by more persons than watched Adlai E. Stevenson and Vice President Nixon combined. And their talks were free."

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This wasn't the bloated Elvis with the sparkling jumpsuits of later years; this was a young, hip-swinging charmer whose fame was on the rise and whose movie *Love Me Tender* had just opened in Toledo earlier in the week.

His shows on Nov. 22, 1956, a bitterly cold day, lasted only 30 minutes and followed two hours of warm-up acts, but they were unforgettable to the 13,125 frenzied fans who were there.

"I had never seen anything like that," remembered Kathleen Lindeman, 73, of South Toledo, who was in the crowd. "All he had to do was lift his arm up and they screamed for five minutes."

Tickets sold for between \$2 and \$2.50, an amount at the time that required many teens to save up. Sue Maenle, 66, of Temperance, had to combine earnings from babysitting with jobs as a waitress at a truck stop and as a roller-skating carhop at a drive-in.

"I just made enough to buy my ticket, and I didn't get to buy any souvenirs or any of that stuff," she said. "It was my dream come true."

She still has the treasured ticket stub: Sec. 17, Row 3, Seat 1.

Teenagers, mostly girls, stood and screamed for much of the concert, often drowning out the sound of Elvis' singing. That didn't bother Sharon Luzius, 65, of West Toledo—she was one of them. But that wasn't enough for her.

"When he came on stage, we were jumping up and down like crazy, of course. I remember going up towards the stage and I touched his shoes. He had suede shoes on. ... I loved the man and I just wanted to touch some part of him," said Mrs. Luzius, whose future husband also happened to be at the show.

Elvis played his early hits, including "Don't Be Cruel" and "Hound Dog." He made \$16,000 for his one-day visit to Toledo, a city he would only return to once, in 1977 at what is now called Savage Hall.

Afterward, a few like Donna Crane were lucky enough to meet the budding king of rock and roll. The 71-year-old Oregon resident, who sometimes worked the concessions stands at the Sports Arena, was taken backstage by the venue's general manager.

There, she had her picture taken with Elvis and gave him an honorary membership to

the Toledo Mercurys hockey booster club, of which she was president.

"After I met him and they saw that he had his arm on my shoulder, every one of those girls out there wanted to touch my coat," she said. "In fact, Elvis asked if I had a comb so he could comb his hair. Unfortunately I didn't have a comb with me at the time or I could probably have sold the teeth out of the comb to the crazy girls."

Elvis' brief stay in Toledo managed to be notable even for him. While at the Commodore Perry Hotel downtown, he was accosted by a young man who shouted, "My wife carries your picture but doesn't carry mine."

Elvis was pummeling the man, Louis John Balint, when police broke up the free-for-all, and Balint eventually pleaded guilty to creating a disturbance. The man

later claimed he was promised \$200 to fake the fight and drum up publicity. Things didn't end up much better for Penny Bailey, 65, of Walbridge, who bought a picture of Elvis after the concert. Her joy at owning a copy of the singer's handsome visage was short-lived.

"I took it home and showed my family and my boyfriend came over and he spotted that and he was extremely jealous, like all the boys were. He tore it up in shreds and flushed it down the toilet," she said. "I was devastated."

Everyone who was there had a story to tell—assuming there was someone willing to listen. When Ruth Trznadel, 62, of Point Place, went home afterward, her mom had saved some Thanksgiving goodies for her. She was starving, but didn't eat much once she got started talking about the concert.

"I can remember my dad later listening to me and saying, 'OK, we just want to know one thing.' And I said, 'What?' He says, 'How are the seats at the Sports Arena?'"

"I said, 'I don't know. I didn't sit in one.'"

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Among the Toledo area residents who attended Elvis' 1956 shows here are, clockwise from top: Ruth Trznadel, who has decorated her office with Elvis photos; Sharon and Gordon Luzius, with their collection of Elvis albums; Donna Crane, holding a photo of herself with the late Sports Arena general manager Andy Mulligan and Elvis, and Sue Maenle, who still has her ticket.



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