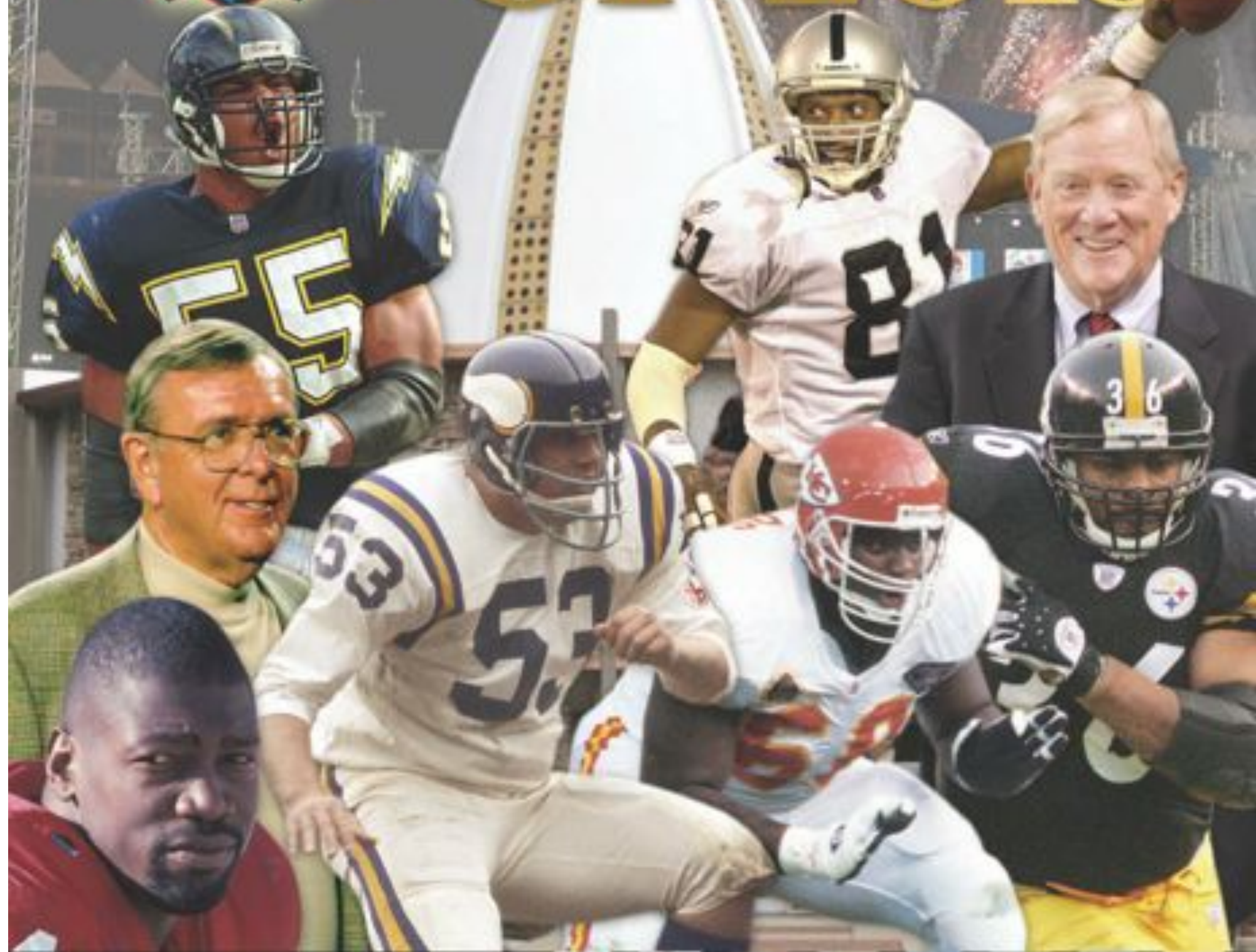




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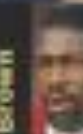
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Bettis



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Pollan



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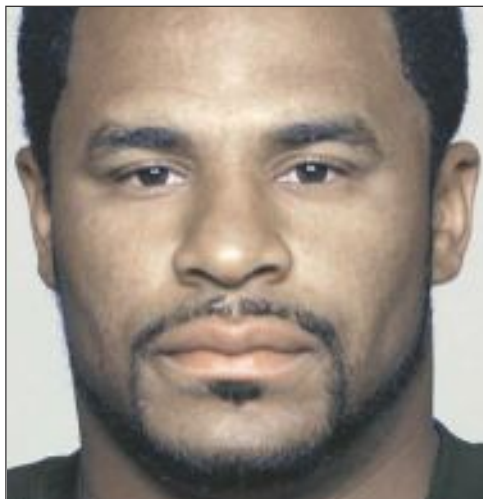
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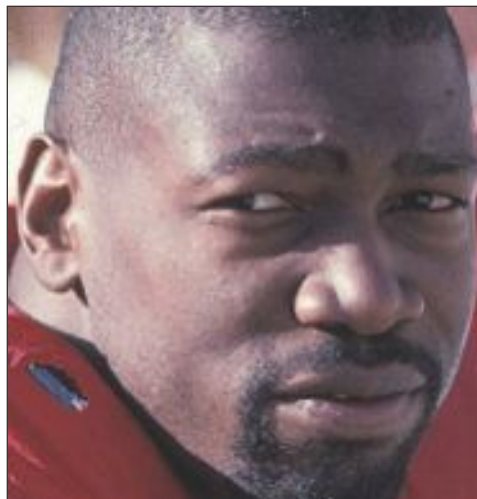
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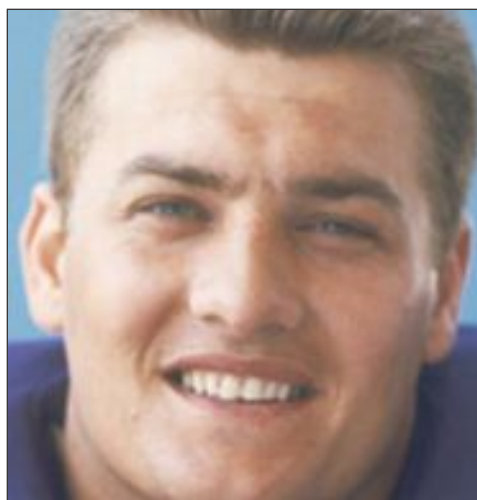
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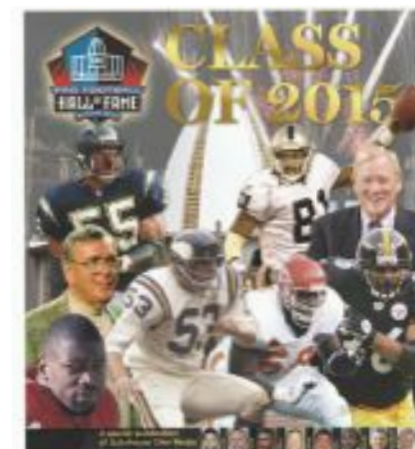
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THE 36 BUS TO CANTON

■ See how Jerome Bettis ended up in the Hall. **PAGE 10**



On the cover

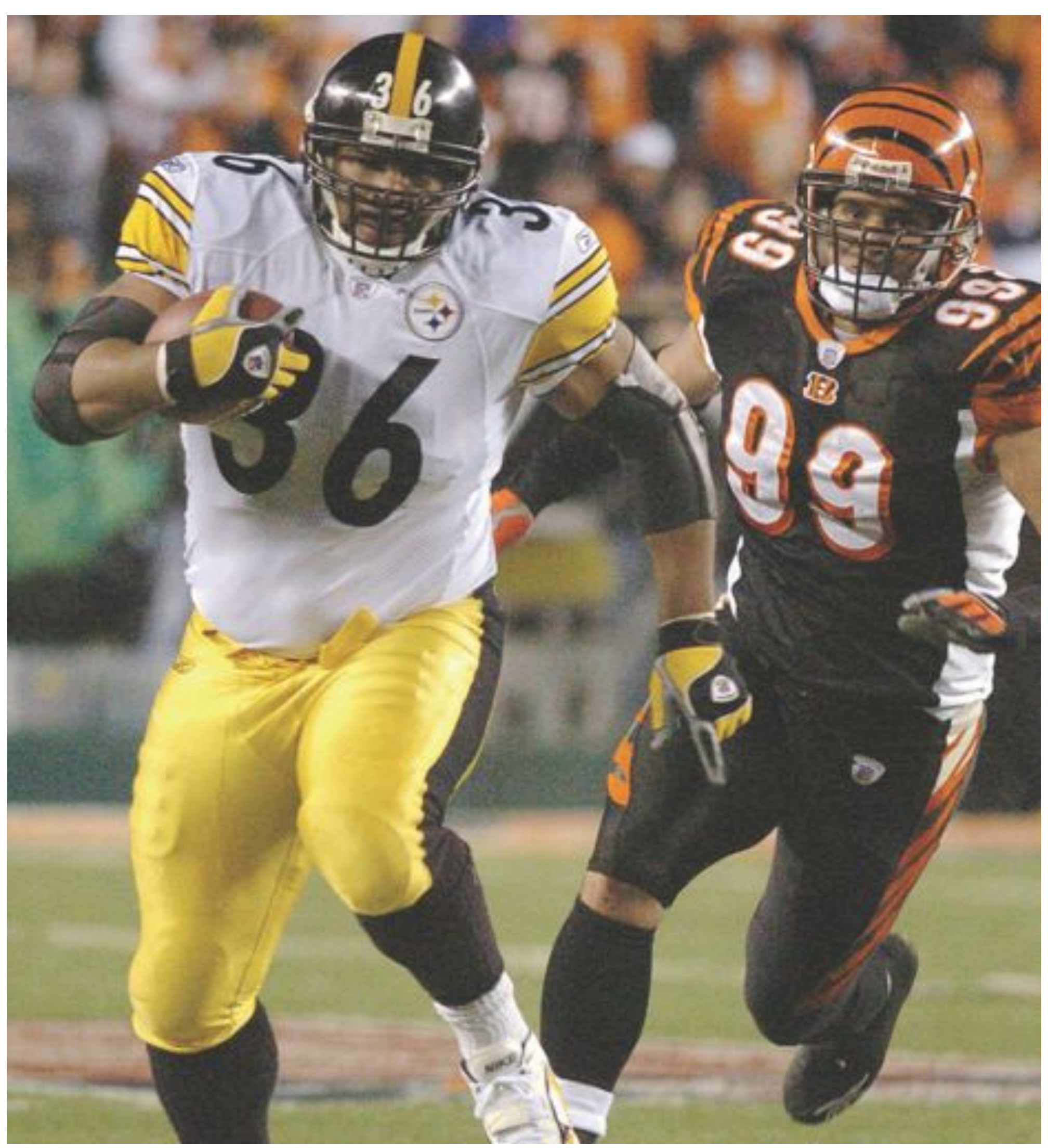
The cover of this section was designed by Greg Kohntopp, using photos from the Repository and the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Pictured are (clockwise from top left) Junior Seau, Tim Brown, Bill Polian, Jerome Bettis, Will Shields, Mick Tingelhoff, Charles Haley and Ron Wolf.

Photo credits

Photos in this section are from The Repository and the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Special thanks to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune for additional photos of Mick Tingelhoff.

About this section

This is an annual publication of GateHouse Ohio Media spotlighting the new members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Extra copies can be purchased at participating outlets or by calling 330-580-8300.





**CANTON'S
CLASS
OF 2015**

Jerome BETTIS

A kid from the west side of Detroit wanted to be a pro bowler, not a Pro Bowler. Then a strong family and coach redirected him to an iconic career at 'The Bus.'

STORIES BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

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BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

Repository sports writer

The Bus would have fit right in. The "A" list on the 2015 Professional Bowlers Association tour is all about the "Bs."

The top three money winners for the first half of 2015 were 31-year-old Jason Belmonte with \$168,861, 45-year-old Chris Barnes with \$112,510, and 52-year-old Parker Bohn III with \$63,305.

Had Jerome Bettis lived out his childhood dream, he would be there with them now, cashing in, at age 43, on his favorite game.

"Bowling," says Bettis, who averaged more than 200 and had rolled perfect games by the time he was 13, "was my first love."

It became his lot to scatter human pins, operating behind 10 teammates whose offense depended on him. He learned to love that, too.

Bowling for dollars? Before Bettis played his first game in the National Football League, he banked a \$2 million signing bonus. His final contract, signed midway through his 10-year run with the Pittsburgh Steelers, called for \$30 million.

Whether it was bowling or football, Bettis was good. Along the way, in surviving a few adolescent nightmares, he was very lucky, too.

"Human Bowling Ball" would have been perfect as Bettis' football nickname, had it not been taken by a former Kent

'The Bus' vs. the best

The NFL's 10 top in terms of career rushing yards:

- **18,355**, Emmitt Smith (1990-2004)
- **16,726**, Walter Payton (1975-87)
- **15,269**, Barry Sanders (1989-98)
- **14,101**, Curtis Martin (1995-2005)
- **13,684**, LaDainian Tomlinson (2001-11)
- **13,662**, **JEROME BETTIS (1993-2005)**
- **13,259**, Eric Dickerson (1983-93)
- **12,739**, Tony Dorsett (1977-88)
- **12,312**, Jim Brown (1957-65)
- **12,279**, Marshall Faulk (1994-2005)



State and NFL running back named Don Nottingham. Instead, Bettis became "The Bus" while playing for a former Kent State linebacker named Lou Holtz at Notre Dame.

He grew into a model team-sport player and citizen, according to coaching kingpin Bill Cowher, who was with Bettis for all 159 of his games as a Steeler.

Viewing rushing yards as pins, Bettis' NFL regular-season total of 13,662 (sixth all-time) equates to about 45 perfect games. He became a 5-foot-11, 255-pound wrecking ball on Steeler teams that went 9-5 in the postseason from 1996-2005.

"There has never been a more selfless person," Cowher said recently. "It was never about Jerome. It was always about the team."

"He was selfless, dependable, tough

and consistent. With the amount of emotion, professionalism and fun he brought to the game, he was a joy to be around.

"He accepted any role, gave you everything he had, had a presence about him and was a great leader.

"Jerome Bettis was a consummate pro and great football player. Ask anybody who tried to tackle him.

"He was everything you would want."

A 'GEEK' IN DETROIT

He had wanted to be a bowler. He grew up on the west side of Detroit in a close-knit family that loved to hit the lanes. He was the youngest of three children raised by parents Johnnie, an electrician, and Gladys, a bowling instructor.

"I wanted to get a bowling scholarship to college," Jerome recalls. "I was in eighth grade when I did some research and

found out that the only college that gave a bowling scholarship was Ohio State. And it was only a partial scholarship."

He was a smart kid who wore big, dark-rimmed glasses and came off as a nerd.

"Oh yeah, he was definitely a geek," his aunt, Gloria Bettis, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2006, when everyone was doing a story on Bettis' final career game — it was in Detroit, Pittsburgh vs. Seattle, in Bettis' first Super Bowl.

"I hated football, hated everything about it," Gladys Bettis said in the same story. "I liked that he bowled. Bowling is safe."

His home was a haven of stability in a neighborhood that grew less and less safe.

The family lived near Joy Road, about five miles from Tiger Stadium. Jerome knew the names of every member of the 1984 World Series champions. His biggest sports hero was a bowler, Earl Anthony. He knew next to nothing of the Detroit Lions.

He was in junior high when he played flag football on what is now Jerome Bettis Field, behind Detroit Urban Lutheran School. A big part of the family budget went to private school tuition, up to high school.

One of Gladys' eight brothers, Leroy Bougard, convinced her that football could be Jerome's path to college.

SEE **BETTIS** 8

BETTIS

CONTINUED FROM 7

Bougard was a high school football coach who accounted for Jerome's intellect, size and coordination. His dancer-like feet looked especially nimble in bowling shoes.

Jerome's first high school was Henry Ford, where he made the JV football team but not many friends.

He transferred to Mackenzie, an architectural jewel that housed as many as 5,000 students before Detroit's population nosedived.

'BIG MISTAKE'

His football experiment began to flourish even as his personal life reached a dangerous crossroads.

In a life story published in 2007, Bettis says his neighborhood "went downhill before our eyes." While covering his high school years in "The Bus: My Life in and out of a Helmet," Bettis says:

■ The next-door home of "a sweet old lady" who died when he was 9 soon became a crack house.

■ His parents were strict, caring and devoted to his welfare, but also were naive about drug trafficking and its ugly tentacles that had become "norms" in the area.

■ He fell into the wrong crowd and for a while took to selling drugs and carrying guns.

■ He was fortunate not to wind up in jail or a coffin, as plenty of acquaintances did.

Mackenzie was torn down in 2012, but it was still viable, with a strong football coach named Bob Dozier, when Bettis was in the process of changing high schools in 1987.

The week Bettis was back in Detroit to play in a Super Bowl, Dozier recalled their first meeting in the Washington Post:

"I was at my desk and he said, 'Coach, can I play for you?' He was speaking so softly you would have thought he was 5-foot-4. Then I looked up and down at him and I saw this solid kid, 5-11 and 195 pounds.

"By the time he came out for the team, he'd put on 35 pounds. It wasn't fat ... all muscle. He lifted weights and did



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ Pittsburgh Steelers running back Jerome Bettis leaps over Green Bay Packers defender LeRoy Butler for some of his 100 yards during a Monday night game in 1998.

everything you could ask of a kid.

"In 10th grade, I used him at middle guard and blocking back. He was real raw, but he was unblockable. He blew people up."

It was Dozier who alerted Gladys Bettis to scuttlebutt about Jerome selling drugs. Bettis says he soon quit selling, but never confessed to his parents until he was well into adulthood.

He admits he made "a big mistake" that could have made him a statistic rather than Bill Cowher's idea of a role model.

'WISH DAD WAS HERE'

By his senior year, Bettis was a force at running back and linebacker with dreams of the NFL and an appreciation of what his coach had done. By 2005, Dozier was retired and living in Texas. Bettis paid for the coach's flight to Detroit for Super Bowl XL and gave him 15 tickets to the game.

In a 21-10 win over Seattle, Bettis hardly had a Hall of Fame day — 14 carries for 43 yards — but afterward he looked like the happiest man in The Motor City.

His Canton credentials had been set in stone. In his last few years, he moved past ex-Steeler Franco Harris, Tony Dorsett and Jim Brown on the all-time rushing yards list.

In 2012, he was named celebrity owner of the Motor City Muscle, an arm of the PBA. Bowling never left his soul.

After high school, Bettis chose Notre Dame over Michigan (see related story) and was a college star by his sophomore year.

Opting into the NFL after three years with Holtz, he was the 10th overall pick of the 1993 draft, by the Los Angeles Rams. He immediately found his parents a new neighborhood, buying them a house along the No. 2 hole at Detroit Golf Club.

Johnnie Bettis was 61 when he died from a heart attack 10 months after watching his son play in the Super Bowl.

"It's a very sad time," Cowher said then. "It's a very close family. I almost felt like they were part of the team."

"Mr. Johnnie was a great man," Steelers safety Mike Logan said. "He went out of his

way to do things for other people. I saw the close relationship he had with his wife, with Jerome."

Early this year, the night he was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Jerome told Gladys, "Mom, I wish Dad was here."

A FINAL BOWLING PIN

Jerome's siblings, John and Kimberly, live in the Detroit area. Jerome and his wife, Trameka, have two children, Jada, 9, and Jerome Jr., 7.

Jerome's new "home" in Canton makes Gladys smile about the days she hated football. She recalls attending every practice, armed with an inhaler, after Jerome was diagnosed with asthma.

Gladys and Johnnie spent a fortune following "The Bus." They attended almost every game their son played, from high school through Super Bowl XL, home and road.

One of the road trips was to Canton for the 1998 Hall of Fame Game. Family members agreed not to go inside the museum because they wanted to wait until there was a bronze bust of Jerome inside. That

was a pivotal time in Bettis' Hall of Fame candidacy. He was in his third year as a Steeler after a 1996 trade with the Rams (see related story).

In the 1997-98 postseason, Bettis had the Steelers on the brink of a Super Bowl, running for 105 yards and a touchdown in a dogfight of an AFC title loss to Denver.

During an ensuing three-year lull outside the playoffs, "The Bus" kept grinding, but while he entered 2001 with five straight 1,000-yard seasons, he was 29 years old, with a résumé light on team success.

During an 8-1 hot streak, he ran 152 times for 838 yards (5.5 average), including a 163-yard game at Cleveland.

He was leading the league in rushing before a knee injury knocked him out for December. He didn't return until the AFC title game, and was not himself in a loss to New England.

In 2002, Bettis helped run head coach Dick LeBeau out of Cincinnati, with four touchdowns in two wins. Fifteen games into the 2003 season, he was strong enough to run 32 times for 115 yards against the Chargers.

The last prolonged stretch of "The Bus" at his best was in 2004, when he was 32. During an eight-game stretch late in a 15-1 season, he topped 100 yards six times, averaging 30 carries in those games. In a playoff opener against the Jets, he ran for 101 yards and a touchdown. Bettis might have retired had the Steelers won the Super Bowl, but they fell in the AFC title game to the Patriots.

He came back in 2005, as Willie Parker's backup.

The snow was flying and the Steelers — in danger of falling to 7-5 — were in the red zone against the Bears. Bettis took a handoff from Ben Roethlisberger and decided to make his own hole where All-Pro linebacker Brian Urlacher was.

"I knew it was Urlacher," Bettis said. "I knew it was going to be a big hit."

The finish was like a 54-ounce bowling pin at the mercy of a 16-pound bowling ball. Urlacher was on his back. "The Bus" parked in the end zone. ■

Crossing paths with Cleveland

BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

Repository sports writer

The earth was moving when Jerome Bettis joined the ground wars of the National Football League.

Teams were laying the groundwork to evacuate cities, and Bettis, a No. 10 overall draft pick by the Los Angeles Rams, was on one of them.

There wasn't much offense in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1992, when Bill Belichick's Browns didn't have a rusher get to 550 yards or a receiver reach 50 catches.

In Los Angeles, however, former first-round pick Cleveland Gary was rocking. The former Miami Hurricane ran for 1,125 yards, caught 52 passes and scored 10 touchdowns.

This led to a 1993 holdout in which Gary's agent demanded a raise from \$350,000 to \$1.2 million. Head coach Chuck Knox's blood pressure rose.

Gary signed in time for a 1993 preseason game at Cleveland, but neither he nor Knox was at peace. Before practicing against the Browns that week in Berea, Gary told the Los Angeles Times:

"You get a lot of high draft picks that come into the league and never perform. Me? I'm not going to bank on what may be. I'm going to bank on what's happened."

His new fellow Rams running back, high draft pick Bettis, arrived on a three-year, \$4.6 million contract with a signing bonus of \$2 million.

Knox was a 30-year pro coach whose appetite for a running game was in his nickname, "Ground Chuck." He loved Bettis' smashmouth style and might have made him the opening-day starter, but for an ankle injury.

Through four starts, the 27-year-old Gary rushed for a grand total of 99 yards, at 2 yards per

carry. Bettis healed. In Game 2, he did strong work in relief against Pittsburgh in a 27-0 win.

During an early bye week, Knox made the change. In Bettis' first two starts, he ran 42 times for 198 yards en route to a 1,429-yard rookie year. In the final 11 games, all started by Bettis, Gary got 33 carries.

Bill Belichick was leaking popularity in Cleveland. Attendance for the Browns' '93 home finale was announced at 48,618. A week later, the Browns got drubbed 42-14 at Los Angeles, although it was the only time in a six-game finishing stretch when Bettis rushed for less than 100 yards.

Gary became a free agent after the season. His agent, Jordan Woy, had floated the idea during the holdout that Jerry Jones was hot on the trail.

"The Cowboys are pretty shrewd," Woy said. "They're interested in picking him up. What does that tell you?"

It became a strange tale for Gary.

Bettis played 12 more seasons. The remainder of Gary's NFL career consisted of two games with the 1994 Miami Dolphins.

Bettis was one of the few things that went right in the final days of "Ground Chuck." The Rams were 6-10 in 1993. After going 4-12 in 1994 despite Bettis' second straight 1,000-year, the team moved to St. Louis, where Bettis plummeted to 637 yards under new head coach Rich Brooks.

In the spring of 1996, the Browns had just moved their offices from Berea to Maryland when the Rams traded Bettis to Pittsburgh. Bettis promptly had a 1,431-yard year. ■

Reach Steve at 330-580-8347 or steve.doerschuk@cantonrep.com
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■ St. Louis Rams running back Jerome Bettis scores a touchdown during a game in 1995. The arrest of Steelers running back Bam Morris and the Rams' drafting of running back Lawrence Phillips opened the door for Bettis to be traded to Pittsburgh. Both Morris and Phillips ended up in prison.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Road to Pittsburgh

Two running backs who landed in prison played key role in Bettis' trade to the Steelers

BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

Repository sports writer

Marijuana may be subject to assorted judgments in the school of public opinion, but in the front office of the 1996 Pittsburgh Steelers, it was an emphatic thumbs down.

Power back Bam Morris was arrested for possessing "weed" in March 1996 and was cut in June.

The 6-foot, 259-pound Morris soon landed with the Baltimore Ravens, who were in their first season after abandoning Cleveland.

Pittsburgh craved a big back to replace Morris, who had big moments for the '95 Steelers team that reached a Super Bowl (notably, 106 yards and two touchdowns in the post-season opener against Buffalo).

Bettis, listed then at 5-11, 243 pounds, wasn't as big as Morris, and his rushing numbers shrank from 1,429 as a 1993 rookie to 1,025 in 1994 to 637 in 1995 with the Rams.

Former Rams head coach Chuck Knox, a Pittsburgh native, recommended Bettis to the Steelers. On draft day 1996, Pittsburgh sent the Rams a second-round pick in 1996 and a fourth-rounder in 1997. The Steelers received a

Hall of Fame hammer.

Bettis recalls his welcome-to-Pittsburgh phone call from head coach Bill Cowher:

"In my rookie year, the Steelers came to Los Angeles. I had a good day, and we beat them up pretty good (27-0 Rams win). Coach Cowher said, 'We just traded for you. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. We're glad to have you.'

"It worked out pretty well."

Then-Rams head coach Rich Brooks explained the trade during a 1996 interview, saying, "I wanted a little more speed at the position. Jerome is an outstanding player, and the Pittsburgh scheme will suit him more than my scheme will. It's a good move for Jerome."

It was a disaster for Brooks, whose team spent a No. 6 overall draft pick on ill-fated running back Lawrence Phillips, now serving a long jail term. Brooks was fired after the '96 Rams went 6-10.

Pittsburgh's love affair with "The Bus" began in his first 1996 home game, against the Ravens. With Morris on a four-game suspension, Bettis punished Baltimore with 116 yards in a 31-17 win.

In a December rematch at

Baltimore, Morris and Bettis seemed like the same back. Both ground out slightly more than 100 yards, with the Ravens reversing the earlier outcome and winning 31-17.

The comparison soon ended. Morris was in Baltimore just one more season and before long was in prison. Bettis became the face of the Steelers, topping 1,000 rushing yards in his first six years with the team.

More than 10 years later, when Bettis was at the end of his career in a Super Bowl, Brooks was more forthcoming about the trade:

"He and his agent wanted to renegotiate the contract, and our people didn't want to do it.

"We all just decided rather than have an unhappy guy around, we'd trade him and get something in return."

Bettis and his family were no fans of Brooks, but the latter couldn't help but admire what "The Bus" achieved.

"He's still got those quick feet," Brooks said in 2006, the week Bettis played in a Super Bowl, "and those defensive backs still want no part of him." ■

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THE NO. 36 BUS: ROUTE TO THE HALL



The Bus' road to Canton began in 1972 in the Motor City. It began with dreams of being a pro bowler and ended with him being a Pro Bowler. Along the way there were several stops around the Midwestern part of the country, and one trip to the West Coast.



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ILLUSTRATION BY
GREG KOHNTOPP,
THE REPOSITORY

THE SCHEDULE

1 Detroit, Mich.

■ **1972** Born Feb. 16, on the city's west side.

■ **1972-84** Dreamed of being a professional bowler ... had a plus-200 average by age 13.

■ **Circa 1985** Began running with the wrong crowd and selling drugs before being turned back on track by football coach Bob Dozier.

■ **1986-89** Starred at Mackenzie H.S. as a RB and LB. By his senior year, had major colleges recruiting him at both positions.

2 South Bend, Ind.

■ **1990** Chose to attend college at Notre Dame over Michigan due to the Irish saying he would play fullback.

■ **1991** Plowed way onto the college football scene as a sophomore, rushing for 972 yards and scoring a school record 20 TDs (16 rushing, 4 receiving).

■ **1992** Followed it up with 825 yards rushing and 16 total TDs as a junior (10 rushing, 6 receiving). Left school after junior season for the NFL.

3 Los Angeles, Calif.

■ **1993** Selected with the No. 10 pick in the draft by the Los Angeles Rams.

■ Flourished as a rookie under coach Chuck Knox's "Ground Chuck" offense, rushing for 1,429 yards (2nd in the NFL), despite not starting until the sixth game of the season.

■ Was named First-Team All-Pro and the NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year.

■ **1994** The Rams — and the Bus — left Los Angeles for St. Louis.

4 St. Louis, Mo.

■ **1995** In moving to St. Louis, the Rams under new coach Rich Brooks, went more pass heavy, and Bettis rushed for just 637 yards that season.

■ **1996** The Rams selected Nebraska running back Lawrence Phillips with the No. 6 pick of the draft.

■ With a diminished role in St. Louis, and the arrest of Pittsburgh Steelers running back Bam Morris, Bettis was sent to the Steel City in a trade prior to the '96 season.

5 Pittsburgh, Pa.

■ **1996-2001** Rushed for more than 1,000 yards in each of his first six seasons with the Steelers, and was named to the Pro Bowl in 2001.

■ **2004** After a down 2003 season, Bettis again returned to the Pro Bowl by rushing for 941 yards rushing and 13 touchdowns.

■ **2005-06** The Bus ended his career in grand fashion, helping the Steelers win the Super Bowl — at Ford Field in his native Detroit.

6 Canton, Ohio

■ **2015-eternity** Enters the Pro Football Hall of Fame along with seven other football greats.

■ Career stats include 13,662 yards rushing and 91 rushing touchdowns.

■ Was a six time Pro Bowl selection and two-time First Team All-Pro.

■ Was Pro Football Writers' Association Good Guy of the Year (2005) and Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year (2001).

The infamous flip

Jerome Bettis was front and center in one of the most controversial calls made during an overtime game.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1998, in Detroit, Bettis was sent out as the Steelers representative for the overtime coin toss.

The extra session was about to begin. Bettis says he called "tails" with the coin in the air, but referee Phil Luckett ruled that "heads" had been called, at which point the Lions elected to receive the overtime kickoff.

Detroit scored to win in "sudden death," leaving Steelers coach Bill Cowher livid.

A league review led to a rule change, wherein the call of "heads" or "tails" had to be called before the coin was tossed. Also, at least two officials had to be present during the toss.

Sound enhancements of the audio suggest Bettis was partly to blame, seeming to say "hea-tails" with the coin in the air. Bettis rejects the interpretation, saying he called "tails" all the way.

Harris vs. Bettis

Jerome Bettis retired in second place on the Steelers' all-time list for rushing yards behind Franco Harris, and now he joins him in the Hall of Fame.

Dick Hoak, a long-ago Pittsburgh back who coached both Harris and Bettis with the Steelers, compared the two:

"Jerome would run over you more. Franco would run away from you.

"Franco was probably faster than Jerome, Jerome was more powerful.

"Franco had great, great vision. Jerome had good vision, too, but not quite as good as Franco. They were different types of backs."

Whereas Jerome Bettis' leads Franco Harris 13,662-12,120 on the all-time rushing-yards list, Harris leads Bettis 11,950-10,571 in yards gained as a Steeler. After three years with the Rams, Bettis enjoyed a 10-year run in Pittsburgh. Harris spent 12 years as a Steeler before closing his career with Seattle in 1984.

Also, the two are tied for 10th place all-time in NFL rushing touchdowns, with 91.



■ Jerome Bettis celebrates the Steelers' 2006 Super Bowl victory.

AP PHOTO

Bus Stops

■ In the Steelers' 2004 season opener, Jerome Bettis carried the football ball five times for a total of 1 yard. Three of the carries were 1-yard touchdown blasts in a 24-21 win over Oakland.

■ The Rams spent their second-round pick they received for Bettis, No. 59 overall in the 1996 draft, on Ernie Conwell, a respectable tight end. He produced 2,188 receiving yards in an 11-year NFL career and helped the Rams win a Super Bowl under head coach Dick Vermeil.

■ Talk about a workhorse. Bettis carried 315 or more times in four different seasons with the Steelers, with a high of 375 in 1997. DeMarco Murray was the only NFL player with more than 315 rushing attempts in 2014. No one reached that mark in 2013.

■ Bettis' fumble late in a 2005 playoff game against the Colts looked as if it would be returned for a game-losing touchdown. Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger made a diving shoestring tackle to keep Nick Harper from what would have been a disastrous turnabout. "I wanted to vote Ben AFC Defensive Player of the Year," Bettis said.

■ Bettis' high school, Mackenzie (in Detroit) was a starting point for future NFL players Pepper Johnson and Gilbert Brown.

STEVE DOERSCHUK



■ Notre Dame running back Jerome Bettis rushes for a touchdown during a 1992 game against Northwestern. Bettis chose Notre Dame over homestate Michigan due to the Irish's use of the fullback. Michigan wanted Bettis as a linebacker.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Holtz pushed the right buttons with Bettis

BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

Repository sports writer

Akron was at the fork of Jerome Bettis' road to South Bend.

After Bettis' 1989 high school football season in Detroit, the two-way star narrowed his college options to Notre Dame and Michigan.

He came out of Mackenzie High school with the body of a blocking fullback, all-state honors at linebacker, and a will to carry the rock.

"The fullback position at Notre Dame was very coveted," Bettis recalls. "At Michigan, it was more an afterthought to tailback."

Still, Michigan was close to home, and Bo Schembechler, the outgoing coach who recruited him, was a legend.

When Akron Buchtel super-back Ricky Powers committed to Michigan, Notre Dame's Lou Holtz amped up his pitch to Bettis.

"Coach Schembechler retired Christmas Eve of my senior year," Bettis recalls. "Coach (Gary) Moeller came in, but no one came to my house.

"Coach Holtz came to the house and met with my mother and my father.

"Michigan wanted me to play linebacker. A lot of schools wanted me to be a

linebacker.

"Notre Dame's offense was built around the fullback. The fullback did everything in that offense."

Powers might have gone to Ohio State, had the Buckeyes not signed Euclid's Robert Smith. Bettis said yes to Holtz.

In his freshman year of 1990, the carries were spread among older players Rodney Culver, Ricky Watters, Tony Brooks and Raghil Ismail. Bettis touched the ball just 11 times.

As a sophomore in 1991, Bettis moved into the lead of a rotation still including Brooks and Culver. He ran for 972 yards and 16 touchdowns on a team that went 10-3.

As a junior in 1992, Bettis battled injuries late in the season, finishing with 825 rushing yards and 12 touchdowns on a team that went 10-1-1. Speedy little Reggie Brooks emerged, running for 1,343 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Bettis, though, was the bigger, better NFL prospect.

"He was a stud both ways in high school," said Vinny Cerrato, Notre Dame's recruiting coordinator when Bettis signed. "He was big, about 240, when he came to South Bend, but he was always in great shape. I don't know that he loved

working out, but he did it.

"He was a 4.6 guy in college ... a great player. I loved the guy."

Bettis and Brooks both left Notre Dame early to enter the 1993 draft. The Seahawks loved Rick Mirer, Notre Dame's quarterback, and drafted him at No. 2 overall (behind Drew Bledsoe).

The 5-foot-8 Brooks went 45th overall to the Redskins. Bettis went 10th overall to the Los Angeles Rams.

Holtz had an acerbic way of pushing Bettis' buttons. One time in college, the coach singled out Bettis as "the reason" Notre Dame was about to lose an important game. Bettis was puzzled at the time, but came to understand Holtz was trying to wake him up.

Another time, Bettis was slogging through a rough third season with the Rams.

"I called him late one night," Holtz said. "I told him, 'Jerome, there's somebody doing a bad impersonation of you, wearing your number and your jersey. You've got to do something about it.' Then I hung up the phone."

Bettis got the message. ■

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**CANTON'S
CLASS
OF 2015**

Tim BROWN



After five misses, the call to Canton was well worth the wait. But this speedster out of Dallas first had to overcome battle after battle to become one of the game's best WRs.

STORIES BY MIKE POPOVICH

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Tim Brown calls his election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame a remarkable thing. The nine-time Pro Bowl receiver and re-turner overcame one battle after another before he was drafted by the Raiders in 1988. A season-ending knee injury the following year made a long-term NFL career seem questionable.

"The years just kept going on and on and on and on and on and on," Brown said. "All of sudden you're in a position where people are saying you possibly could be in the Hall of Fame."

They were right.

Brown set franchise records for receptions, receiving yards and punt return yards during his 16 seasons with the Raiders. His 14,934 receiving yards at the time of his retirement after the 2004 season was the second-highest total in NFL history. His 1,094 receptions ranked third. His 100 touchdown catches tied for third.

A multi-talented threat, Brown was left out of the Hall of Fame five straight times after becoming eligible. The wait was worth it.

"The last five years have been pretty difficult," Brown said. "... I came into this year hoping for better things and I'm very elated to be sitting here right now, that's for sure.

"I knew my day was coming. I couldn't tell you if it was going to be this year or five years from now, but I knew it was

Quite the catch

A look at where Tim Brown ranks on the NFL's all-time receptions leaderboard:

1, x -Jerry Rice	1,549	1985-2004
2, Tony Gonzalez	1,325	1997-2013
3, Marvin Harrison	1,102	1996-2008
4, x -Cris Carter	1,101	1987-2002
5, x-Tim Brown	1,094	1988-2004
6, Terrell Owens	1,078	1996-2010
7, o -Reggie Wayne	1,070	2001-2014
8, Isaac Bruce	1,024	1994-2009
9, o -Andre Johnson	1,012	2003-2014
10, Hines Ward	1,000	1998-2011

x-Pro Football Hall of Famers
o-Active

coming. I just tried to stay patient and manage the expectations of the people around me, which is the most difficult thing about this process."

CHURCH KID

Brown grew up in Dallas and is the first player from the Dallas Independent School District to enter the Hall of Fame. His father, Eugene, was a foreman on a construction crew during the day and managed a nightclub at night. Eugene married Brown's mother, Josephine, when she turned 18.

A scary accident when Brown was six months old changed his life before he knew what life was. A still-burning iron fell on him after he pulled the cord. The impact led to hearing loss and infection



in his left arm.

"I grew up in the 'hood and we didn't go to doctors," Brown said. "We didn't do that kind of stuff. Put a bandage on and go about your business.

"That's what mom did, but it didn't work."

Brown said doctors talked about doing a tracheotomy to help aid his breathing. His grandfather and uncle were pastors and they prayed with his mom.

A few hours later they saw Brown playing like a normal six-month-old. Surgery was not needed.

"It set me on a path where even at that particular time, my parents, grandfather and uncle said this boy is going to be in church," Brown said. "... My whole life has centered around church."

PICKING THE IRISH

Brown attended Woodrow Wilson High School in East Dallas. Davey O'Brien, a Heisman Trophy winner in the 1930s, is among Wilson's notable alumni. Musician Steve Miller also attended the school.

Wilson went 4-25-1 during Brown's three seasons on the varsity team. One win came against rival Skyline, which featured NCAA Division I recruit Dante Jones.

"If not for him, I don't know if Notre Dame or anybody finds out about Tim Brown," Brown said.

Notre Dame came to Texas to watch Jones that day. What the Fighting Irish scouts saw was one of Brown's best games on any level.

"It was the only game we won that year," Brown said. "I had a 97-yard kick return, an 86-yard punt return, a 70-some-yard catch and a 66-yard run for a touchdown.

"The amazing thing about that is if Notre Dame came the week before, I didn't score at all. If they came the week afterward, I scored one touchdown. In my 27 years of playing football ... I scored four touchdowns one time."

Notre Dame had interest in Brown right away. He also received letters from Ohio State and nearby Southwest Conference schools.

BROWN

CONTINUED FROM 15

“He had a lot of pressure from the state of Texas to stay there,” former Notre Dame head coach Gerry Faust said. “... We didn’t know until national letter day if we were going to get him or not.”

Brown’s parents emphasized how important a great education was. Notre Dame was his choice.

“To me it was the hardest decision I ever made in my life,” Brown said. “I didn’t want to leave and go 1,500 miles away from Dallas, Texas. I wanted to stay right there and play football at home, but no one offered what my parents wanted me to have at that particular time.

“I listened to my parents, and it turned out to be the best decision I ever made in my life.”

ALL ABOUT HEART

Brown’s college career kicked off in 1984 against Purdue at Indianapolis’ Hoosier Dome, the new home of the relocated NFL Colts. Faust put Brown on Notre Dame’s return team. His first return on the opening kickoff did not go well.

“They squib-kicked the ball, and to my credit I get in front of the ball, pick it up, make a couple of steps, run into the back of one of my guys and I drop the ball,” Brown said. “I don’t know I drop the ball because I’m not even on this planet at this particular time. I take a couple of steps and wonder why no one is chasing me. I turn around, see the ball on the 8-yard line and think ‘Oh, that’s why.’

“They recover the ball. We end up losing the game by a field goal. Of course everybody blamed me for that. That’s why I was so focused on an education.”

There was no way but up for Brown. Over the next few years, he exceeded his own expectations.

Brown started in all but one game during his final three seasons at Notre Dame. As a receiver, rusher out of a full house backfield and punt and kick returner, he ranked third in the nation with an average of 176.5 all-purpose yards a game his junior year.

“He played with his heart,” Faust said.

Lou Holtz replaced Faust as Notre Dame’s head coach and

USC vs. Notre Dame in the Hall

With alums Tim Brown and Jerome Bettis in the Class of 2015, Notre Dame is now tied with rival USC for most all-time with 12. USC keeps pace with the Irish with fellow Class of 2015 member Junior Seau. Here is the complete list for the schools:

USC

Marcus Allen
Morris (Red) Badgro
Frank Gifford
Ronnie Lott
Bruce Matthews
Ron Mix
Anthony Munoz
Junior Seau
O.J. Simpson
Lynn Swann
Willie Wood
Ron Yary

NOTRE DAME

Jerome Bettis
Tim Brown
Nick Buoniconti
Dave Casper
George Connor
Paul Hornung
Earl (Curly) Lambeau
John (Blood) McNally
Wayne Millner
Joe Montana
Alan Page
George Trafton



told Brown he could be the best player in the country. Brown did not want to believe him.

“I’m going to be a senior, and the only thing on my mind is I’m going to graduate,” Brown said. “My mom and dad had to drop out of high school to help the family survive. For us, what they wanted was a great education. It was my time to graduate from college and it was hugely important I did that.”

‘EASY PICK’

Jim Murray, the late Los Angeles Times sports columnist, told Brown he would be a front-runner for the Heisman Trophy. In a come-from-behind 38-37 victory over USC he saw Brown roll up 254 all-purpose yards, including 56 on a punt return that put Notre Dame in position to win.

Brown listened to Holtz and felt he had nothing to lose. He averaged 167.9 all-purpose yards a game his senior year and finished his career as the Irish’s all-time leader in receiving yards with 2,493. He also had three punt and three kickoff returns for touchdowns. Two punt returns for touchdowns came in a 31-8 win over Michigan State.

Murray was right. Brown became Notre Dame’s seventh Heisman Trophy winner after the 1987 season. He is the last Irish player to win the award.

“We were just blown away by it as a family,” Brown said. “It was something that was not on the agenda.”

The Raiders selected Brown with the sixth overall pick in the 1988 NFL Draft. The team was based in Los Angeles and played at Memorial Coliseum, where Brown’s eye-opening game against USC was held.

Ron Wolf, who is also going into the Hall of Fame, ran the Raiders’ personnel department when the team drafted Brown.

“Every player that you draft, you hope they get into the Hall of Fame,” Wolf said. “Tim’s career at Notre Dame was just outstanding. He did everything a person could do as a wide receiver plus a returner.

“To have a player of that caliber available to you, it was an easy pick.”

EARLY INJURY

Brown caught 43 passes and scored five touchdowns as rookie. His biggest impact was as a kick returner where he averaged 26.8 yards on 41 returns and scored a touchdown. He also set an NFL rookie record for net yards with 2,317.

Brown faced his first major NFL hurdle in the opener the following year when he suffered a season-ending knee injury. His doctors did not anticipate him having a long career. One of them told him “three years, maybe five.”

“He told me ‘Don’t tell (Raiders owner) Al Davis this, but that great education you got, you need to put it to use,’” Brown said. “I can remember the only ring I had on at that particular time was my Notre Dame class ring. I remember kissing that ring because I was happy I had a chance at life. I had a chance to go on and do something else because of the education I had.

“I prepared myself to leave the game. I started businesses. I did this. I did that. I knew that anytime I walked on the field with a knee injury like I had, you know you better get ready to do something else.”

Make no mistake, Brown was

not ready to announce he was retiring.

“Because of that preparation and dedication, I said I’m going to be the best I possibly can anytime I hit the field,” he said.

LATEST RAIDER GREAT

Brown was used mostly as a punt returner after he returned in 1990, but also caught 103 passes over the next three seasons. He never played on first or second down.

His breakout year came in 1993 when he caught 80 passes for 1,180 yards and seven touchdowns. It was the first of nine straight 1,000-yard seasons and 10 straight years with at least 75 catches.

A record-setting 1997 season helped Brown earn his seventh Pro Bowl berth. He won the NFL’s receiving title by catching 104 passes for 1,408 yards and became the Raiders’ all-time receiving leader. His seven 100-yard receiving games broke the team record while his five 150-yard-plus receiving games tied an NFL mark.

Brown caught 90 passes for 1,344 yards and six touchdowns in 1999, Jon Gruden’s second season as the Raiders’ head coach. The 1,344 receiving yards ranks as the second-highest total of his career.

The following year, Brown had a career-best 11 touchdown catches.

“I don’t think there’s any doubt that without Jon Gruden and what he did for me in those four years, I wouldn’t be here,” Brown said. “My numbers were OK, but when he came, in four years what we were able to do sort of put me in a totally different atmosphere.”

Brown played his final season in 2004 for Gruden at Tampa Bay. He signed a one-day contract with the Raiders and retired as the longest-tenured player in team history.

Now he has something in common with Raider greats such as Marcus Allen, Willie Brown, Howie Long and Gene Upshaw.

“When you think about all the great players who played for the Raiders and all the Hall of Famers they have already, to add your name to that list is really amazing,” Brown said. ■

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‘America’s Team’ was must-see TV for Brown

BY MIKE POPOVICH

Repository sports writer

“America’s Team” became must-see TV for a young Tim Brown. Long before he could think about becoming a Hall of Famer, he watched future Hall of Famers lead the Dallas Cowboys, inspiring him in his own football career.

Brown grew up in Dallas when the Cowboys were first called “America’s Team.”

The team that won the Super Bowl after the 1977 season had five players elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Head coach Tom Landry and general manager Tex Schramm also ended up in Canton.

Brown was 11 the year Dallas beat Denver in Super Bowl XII, and aspiring players his age lived for watching the Cowboys on TV.

Drastic measures were sometimes taken to watch their games. Brown admitted he snuck out of church to do it.

“We had a little van that had a TV in it and I would always get in trouble,” Brown said. “One of the deacons would always find me in the van watching the football game.”

Quarterback Roger Staubach was the team’s leader when the Cowboys beat Denver. Their star rookie running back was Tony Dorsett, another future Hall of Famer. Dorsett had a big impact on Brown.

“I just loved the guy,” Brown said. “I thought he was an incredible player. He wasn’t the biggest guy to be playing that position. I thought he was tough as nails.

“I loved watching him play. It was always great to see him on Sunday afternoons.” ■

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Keeping football a secret from mom

BY MIKE POPOVICH

Repository sports writer

Tim Brown went against his mother's wishes.

If he didn't, he would not be going into the Pro Football Hall of Fame this year.

Brown's mom, Josephine, did not like football. She did not want him to get hurt. She was raised in a Pentecostal church which felt organized sports conflicted with the church's principles.

Josephine was happy when Brown joined the high school marching band. What she did not know was Brown also was playing on the freshman football team.

Brown had to give up band his sophomore year when he made the varsity team. His secret would eventually come out.

"I had a couple good games as a sophomore, and it ended up in the paper," Brown said. "One of her friends called her and said 'Your son's in the paper.'"

"I got into some trouble. That's when she found out I was playing football, and she was highly upset with who had signed the paper for me to play."



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ Tim Brown (right), poses with his parents Eugene and Josephine Brown, after winning the 1987 Heisman Trophy.

Josephine would not easily accept defeat. She tried to talk Brown out of playing football through his college career at Notre Dame.

"Notre Dame had this thing where you didn't have to play football to graduate from there," Brown said. "You could quit the team and still have your scholarship. She was like 'Just quit.'"

"Up until I won the Heisman, I think she was all about me still being in the band and not playing in the NFL."

Notre Dame head coach Gerry Faust met with Brown's family. Josephine had two questions for him.

Will her son graduate?

Faust answered yes.

Josephine also told him the family

was Pentecostal.

"She says 'You're not going to make a Catholic out of him?'" Faust recalled. "I said 'No, I'm not.'"

"But he learned the Hail Mary. Tim Brown recited the Hail Mary, and everybody just broke up."

Brown likely would have played college football closer to home if the Southwest Conference was not hit by recruiting scandals and NCAA probation. Repeated violations by Southern Methodist, located in Brown's hometown of Dallas, forced the cancellation of the team's 1987 season.

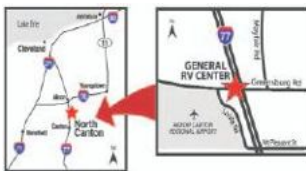
"My parents wanted me to get a great education," Brown said. "During that time in the Southwest Conference and in a lot of conferences down South, people talking about other things than graduating from college. My parents wanted no part of it."

"Thankfully, I had great parents and a great big brother to guide me at that particular time. Everybody said Notre Dame is the best place for you. You need to go there." ■

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NFL career leaders

RECEIVING YARDS

1, x -Jerry Rice	22,895
2, Terrell Owens	15,934
3, Randy Moss	15,292
4, Isaac Bruce	15,208
5, Tony Gonzalez	15,127
6, x -Tim Brown	14,934
7, Marvin Harrison	14,580
8, o -Reggie Wayne	14,345
9, x -James Lofton	14,004
10, x -Cris Carter	13,899

x-Pro Football Hall of Famers
o-Active

RECEIVING TDS

1, x -Jerry Rice	197
2, Randy Moss	156
3, Terrell Owens	153
4, x -Cris Carter	130
5, Marvin Harrison	128
6, Tony Gonzalez	111
7, x -Tim Brown	100
x -Steve Largent	100
9, x -Don Hutson	99
o -Antonio Gates	99

x-Pro Football Hall of Famers
o-Active

PUNT RETURNS

1, Brian Mitchell	463
2, Eric Metcalf	351
3, Dave Meggett	349
4, x -Tim Brown	326
5, Darrien Gordon	314
6, Antwaan Randle El	311
7, Allen Rossum	307
8, Glyn Milburn	304
9, Jermaine Lewis	295
10, Vai Sikahema	292

x-Pro Football Hall of Famers

PUNT RETURN YARDS

1, Brian Mitchell	4,999
2, Dave Meggett	3,708
3, Darrien Gordon	3,601
4, o -Devin Hester	3,481
5, Eric Metcalf	3,453
6, x -Tim Brown	3,320
7, Billy Johnson	3,317
8, Jermaine Lewis	3,282
9, Vai Sikahema	3,169
10, Allen Rossum	3,056

x-Pro Football Hall of Famers
o-Active

ALL-PURPOSE YARDS

1, x -Jerry Rice	23,546
2, Brian Mitchell	23,330
3, x -Walter Payton	21,803
4, x -Emmitt Smith	21,564
5, x -Tim Brown	19,682
6, x -Marshall Faulk	19,190
7, LaDainian Tomlinson	18,456
8, x -Barry Sanders	18,308
9, Herschel Walker	18,168
10, o -Steve Smith	17,679

x-Pro Football Hall of Famers
o-Active



■ The Black Hole fan section cheers on the Oakland Raiders during a 2012 game against the Denver Broncos. The Raiders, who were founded in Oakland, moved to Los Angeles before moving back to Oakland, could be on the move again as an attempt is being made to lure the team back to Los Angeles.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Respect for 'Raider Nation'

Whether in L.A. or Oakland, Brown has love for the fans

BY MIKE POPOVICH

Repository sports writer

Tim Brown remains the last Los Angeles Raiders player to be with the team after it moved back to Oakland in 1995.

By this time next year, he may not be the last Los Angeles Raider, period.

The on-again, off-again drama surrounding the Raiders' hope for a new stadium may lead them back to Southern California as early as 2016. The Raiders and San Diego Chargers plan to jointly pursue a \$1.65 billion NFL stadium in the Los Angeles suburb of Carson if they are unable to get new facilities in their home cities.

Brown was drafted by the Raiders when they played at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. He played seven years in Los Angeles and nine more in Oakland after the team relocated to its original home.

"The fanbase in Oakland because the organization was founded up there has a lot more history behind them," Brown said. "When they talked about the game, they would bring up the older players. The L.A. crowd was all about the guys starting with Marcus Allen and Howie Long. From that standpoint it was different, but the passion was there, no doubt about it."

Win or lose, Oakland or Los Angeles, the Raiders have one

of the most loyal and rabid fan bases in the National Football League. Many come to games in intimidating silver and black costumes.

When the Raiders' move to Los Angeles in 1982 expanded the team's fanbase, the name "Raider Nation" originated.

"Playing for Raider Nation is the most incredible thing ever," Brown said. "A lot of the things I did on the football field was because of my relationship with the fans. I had such a great respect for them and them for me that I almost felt obligated to go out and play even when I couldn't play or shouldn't have been playing."

"The reward I've gotten from that is anything I need Raider Nation to do, they're all about it. They support me in every way they possibly can. The most incredible relationship I've had outside of my family is with thousands and thousands of fans across the country."

Raider Nation has suffered through some lean years. The Raiders' last winning season was in 2002 when they reached Super Bowl XXXVII against Tampa Bay. Their last Super Bowl win was at the end of the 1983 season when they were based in Los Angeles.

"They have to get some players in there to help the situation out," Brown said. "...

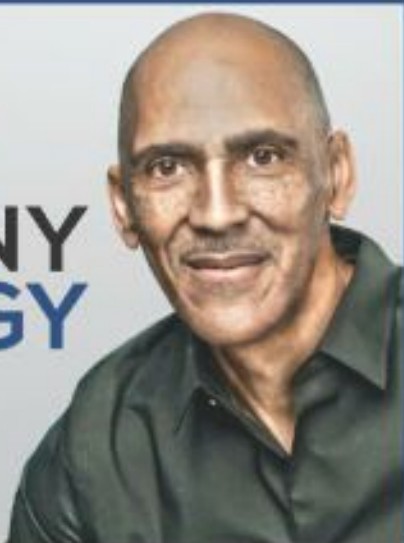
You have to build a nucleus of guys who believe in winning and want to win for the Raiders.

"If you can do that, you can


get the thing (turned around) pretty quickly." ■

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Old guys go on 'incredible' run

Raiders brought in HOF WR Jerry Rice in 2001 to help Brown, veteran team reach Super Bowl

BY MIKE POPOVICH

Repository sports writer

Tim Brown and the Oakland Raiders sat on the brink of the Super Bowl as the new millennium dawned.

Another future Pro Football Hall of Fame receiver had his sights set on one more title when he traveled across the bay in 2001.

After winning three Super Bowls in 16 seasons with the San Francisco 49ers, Jerry Rice signed with the Raiders as a free agent. The Raiders were coming off a loss to the Baltimore Ravens in the AFC championship game.

At 35, Brown's career was nearing the end. Suddenly, he had another great receiver by his side.

"It was incredible," Brown said. "I was actually in New York when he signed his deal. They had called me a day or two before and asked me about it. I was like 'If Jerry wants to come and play, sign him up.'

"It was great. Jerry and I had an incredible time playing together. We did everything we could possibly do on the football field to try to win a championship. He consistently said 'I'm over here for one reason, and that's to help Tim Brown win a Super Bowl.' Sometimes you think guys say

something for the media. We realize he really meant it and did everything in his power to make that happen."

Brown and Rice were part of a talented, albeit, aging team.

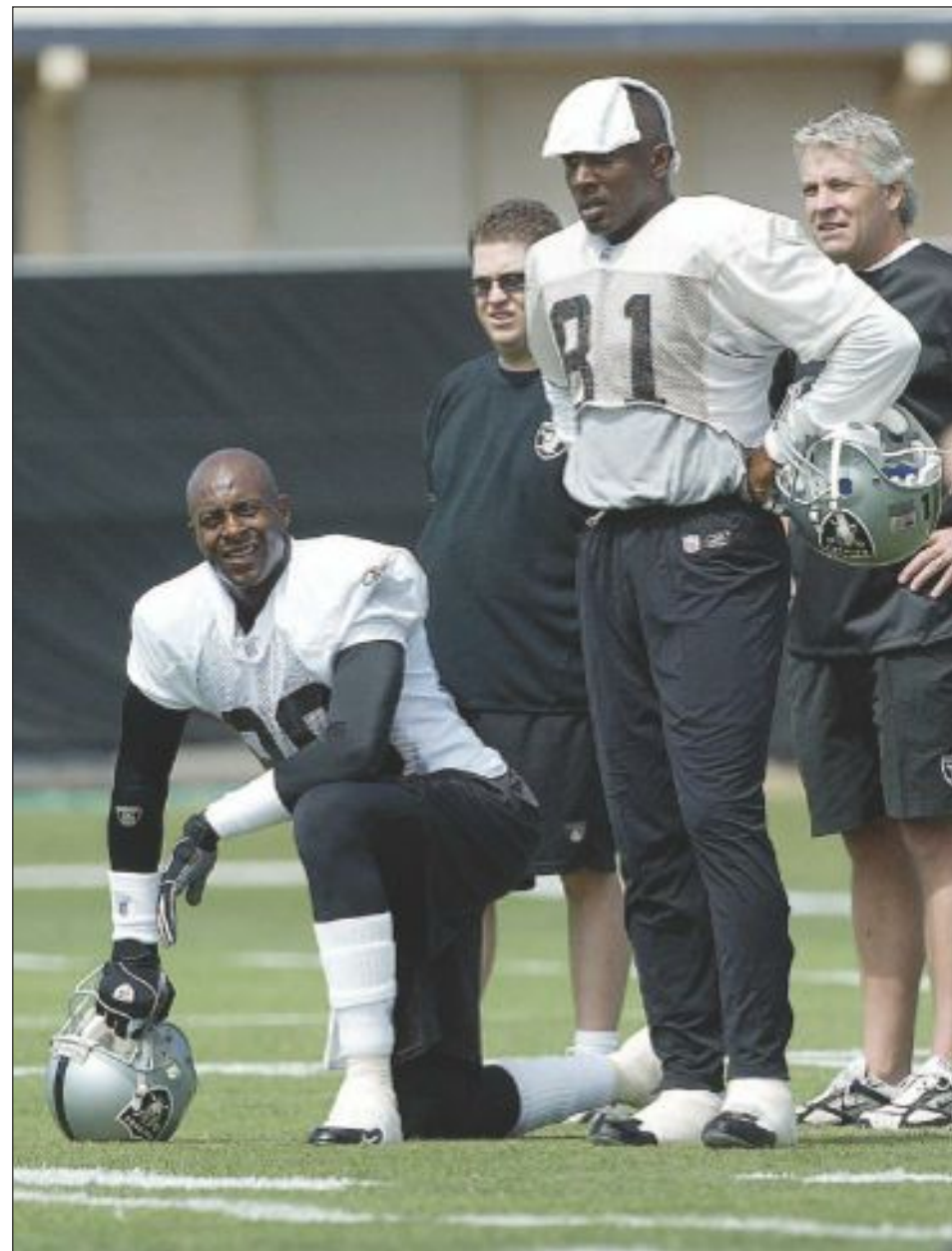
Rice was 38. Quarterback Rich Gannon and cornerback Eric Allen were 35. Offensive guard Steve Wisniewski was 34.

"We were old," Brown said. "... The main guys on the team were very, very veteran guys, but we just clicked like no other team that I had been on."

"With (head coach) Jon Gruden and everything he had brought to us, we knew that we were going to be a good football team. It was just a matter of could the old guys play well enough to make it to the big game."

Brown earned his ninth and final Pro Bowl berth in 2001 as the Raiders won the AFC West with a 10-6 record. A 16-13 loss at New England in the divisional playoffs ended their season. Known as the "Tuck Game," the Patriots kicked a tying field goal after quarterback Tom Brady pump faked a throw, was hit and fumbled. The pass was ruled incomplete and not a fumble.

Gruden left Oakland for Tampa Bay in 2002, but the Raiders went 11-5 and won



■ Oakland Raiders wide receivers Jerry Rice (left) and Tim Brown look on during a practice at training camp. The two Hall of Fame wide receivers played on a Raiders team that won the AFC West in 2001 and 2002, reaching the Super Bowl during the '02 season.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

the AFC West again with Brown and Rice at receiver. They beat the New York Jets

and Tennessee Titans to reach their first Super Bowl in 19 years.

Brown's only Super Bowl appearance came in a loss to Gruden's Buccaneers. It was the end of an era for the veteran team.

"During that time," Brown said, "to have the group of guys we had, such a veteran group, and to be able to play at such a high level was pretty impressive." ■

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CANTON'S CLASS OF 2015

Charles HALEY

A competitive drive helped this Virginia native overcome culture shock and bipolar disorder. He become one of the most feared — and winningest — players in NFL history.

STORIES BY B.J. LISKO

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Charles Haley stood at the San Francisco airport and had an experience he had seldom felt before. The 6-foot-5 linebacker who had struck fear into the hearts of opposing offenses in his time with the James Madison Dukes couldn't quite explain it. He couldn't find the words. Fear had taken hold, and all Haley wanted to do was hop onto a plane back to Virginia — back to where things made sense.

A fourth-round draft pick by the 49ers in 1986, Haley scanned the airport and simply couldn't process what had happened and what he was seeing.

"It was a culture shock for me," Haley said. "I had no clue what was going on. Where I grew up, it was black and white. When I got there, it was everything. All races. All different kinds of people. I was talking to white people who spoke a different language. I was talking to black people who spoke a different language. I was scared. I went back to the gate and thought I could catch a plane back home. I went from not going 30 minutes from my hometown to going across the world. That tells you how I felt."

Eventually, it was his new 49ers "family" that calmed him down.

"Joe (Montana), Jerry (Rice), Keena (Turner), these guys, they only talked about family," Haley said. "They never talked about individual things. Ed DeBartolo, Bill Walsh, that was the way they talked."

Haley had indeed found a new home,



Charles Haley by the numbers

101.5 Haley's career sack total

5 Super Bowl-winning teams Haley was a part of which included the 1988 and '89 San Francisco 49ers and the 1992, '93 and '95 Dallas Cowboys

4.5 Career sacks in the Super Bowl, the most in NFL history

8 The number of times Haley led his team in sacks

1 The number of losing seasons in Haley's 12-year career, the only of which was his final year in 1999

and it was one that would help him on his long journey into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

As a student at William Campbell High School in Naruna, Virginia, Haley hadn't yet become the imposing figure he's remembered as today. His three older brothers were athletic and all involved in sports — so much so that Haley admitted to becoming the "class clown."

"I didn't think I could measure up to those guys," Haley said. "People told me, 'You ain't nothing. You're never gonna be

nothing.'"

Disgruntled, downtrodden, Haley sought divine intervention.

"I asked God, 'Please give me one thing great to be good at,'" he said. "It was football from then on. I became stronger. I believed in me. I took that attitude to college."

In 2003, when Haley received an alumni achievement award from his college alma mater, he credited James Madison head coach Challace McMillin for helping continue his path to the NFL.

"He taught me to set my goals high," Haley said. "He was a father figure to me."

McMillin remembers Haley as one of the best players he has ever coached.

"Charles was not only an outstanding talent, but he had a tremendous work ethic," McMillin said. "He was one of the most competitive athletes I ever coached, and he had a tremendous attitude. The fact that he's the only NFL player to have five Super Bowl rings says that he deserves to be in the NFL Hall of Fame."

'FIRE AND DESIRE'

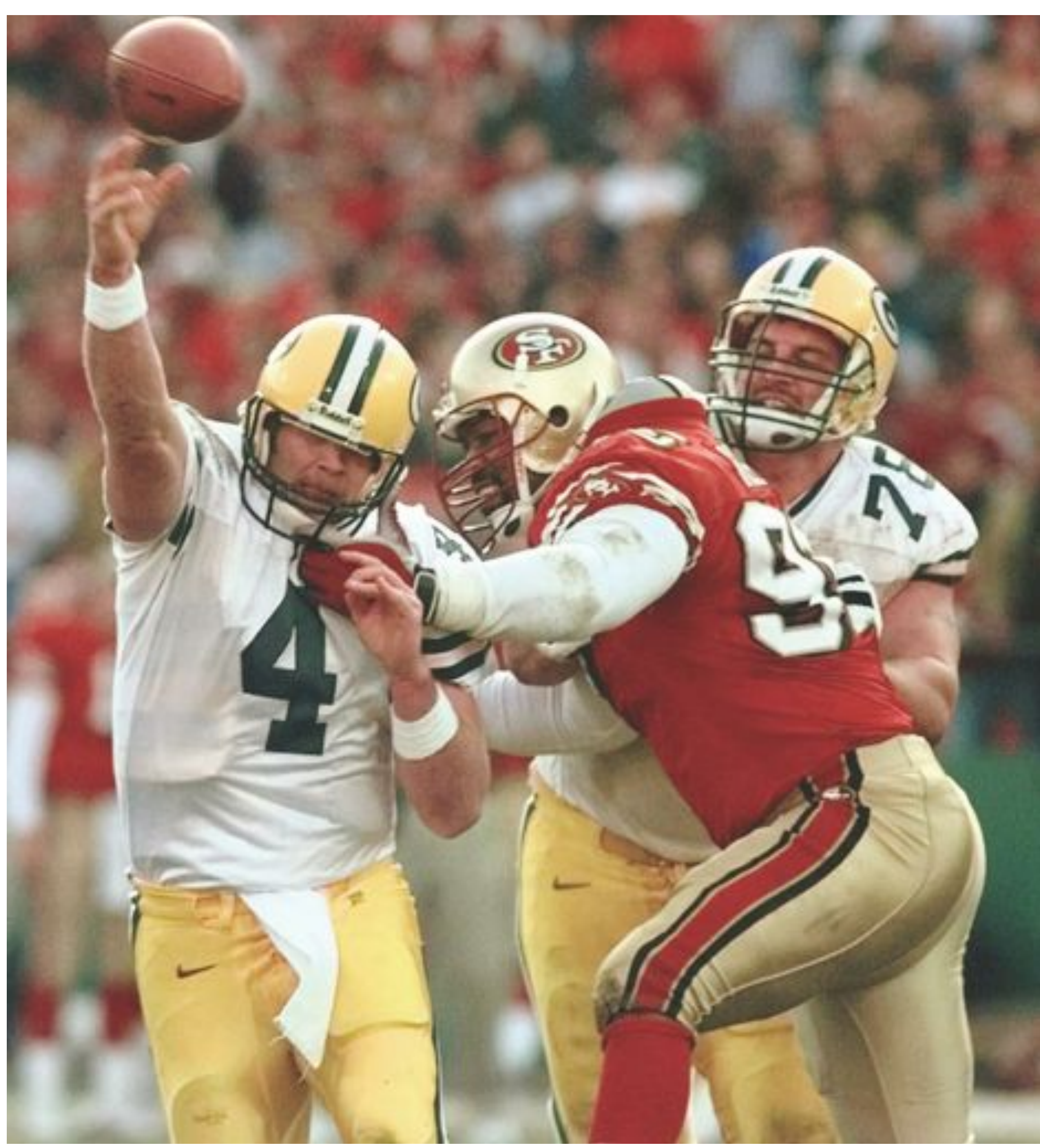
Haley is the only player in NFL history to win five Super Bowls. Perhaps more impressive, however, is that in 12 seasons he played on just one team with a losing record.

"Hell, I didn't know I was going to the NFL," Haley said. "I didn't even know I was going to college. But I don't believe in luck. I believe in hard work, and that's what happened. When I got the opportunity, I wasn't gonna turn it loose. And whatever it took to stay there, I was willing to do."

Haley also was named to five Pro Bowls (1989, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996), played in six NFC championship games and was a member of 10 division championship teams.

Simply put, Haley was a winner. "Singer) Rick James said it best," Haley said. "'Fire and Desire.' I played fired up. But then we had to change the limit of desire. Players had to understand, it ain't about talking, it's about action."

SEE **HALEY 22**



HALEY

CONTINUED FROM 20

McMillin had helped instill core values in Haley at James Madison. Hall of Fame 49ers coach Bill Walsh continued the trend.

“Action is what Bill Walsh instilled in me,” Haley said. “It doesn’t matter what set of circumstances got you here. Take advantage of the circumstances once you get there.”

Haley was tenacious. He totaled 100.5 sacks in his career, and eight times, Haley-led defenses led the NFL in the statistic.

“I think what really made Charles Haley a great player, is that he was one of those guys that could run over you, or he was so fast he could run around you,” said fellow Hall of Famer and former 49ers teammate Jerry Rice in a statement.

“That really made him unique. He just caused havoc on the football field. This guy could take over the ballgame. There aren’t many guys as a defensive player that could take over the game like that.”

Rams Hall of Fame offensive tackle Jackie Slater, a former division rival, agreed.

“On Sundays, there was no player more devastating or defensively impactful in pro football during my time playing than Charles Haley,” he said. “Anybody who says otherwise is not telling the truth. I was an offensive lineman. I had to block the guy. There were very few guys presenting the challenges or doing the things that he was.”

49ER OR COWBOY?

When Haley came to Dallas, he brought his work ethic and defensive swagger with him. He was already a part of two Super Bowl-winning teams in San Francisco (XXIII, XXIV), but his abrasive demeanor (diagnosed with bipolar disorder after his retirement) was starting to cause rifts among the 49ers locker room and coaching staff.

Enter Jerry Jones and Jimmy Johnson.

“Charles was a difference-maker for us,” Jones said following the announcement of Haley’s Hall induction.

“He put the 1990s Cowboys



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ San Francisco 49ers linebacker Charles Haley sacks and forces a fumble by New York Jets quarterback Ken O'Brien during a 1989 game.

over the top. He brought personal spirit and a competitive drive to our organization that changed the course of Cowboys history. Intelligence, toughness, will and determination are what Charles means to me. He was a defensive playmaker and a game-changer. A complete player.”

Haley had hoped someone representing both the Cowboys and 49ers would be able to present his enshrinement. The Hall wouldn’t allow it, so Haley will be presented by former 49ers owner Eddie DeBartolo.

“I wanted to do a combo, and I stressed to them there’s not going to be anybody that’s going to be with one team the rest of their careers,” Haley said.

It turns out a promise to Walsh is what swayed Haley to pick DeBartolo.

“I promised Bill Walsh before he died that I wanted him to present me,” Haley said.

“He was there for me, and I could call him about anything. So it was an easy thing for me to go with the 49ers.”

Still, Haley insists it’s not a

slight toward the Cowboys.

“For me it’s hard to separate,” Haley said. “I had four of the greatest coaches ever, two of the greatest owners ever, and I played with some of the greatest players ever. I can’t elevate one without dropping the other. I had a really great time with both teams. I got to the Cowboys, and I had one of two things to do. Either I was gonna play like a champion, or quit. And I don’t have quit in me.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

After winning his first Super Bowl in 1989, Haley wasn’t comfortable wearing his championship ring. The feeling didn’t change even after four more.

“My goal in life is to be the best I could ever be,” Haley said. “When you walk around wearing Super Bowl rings, people are telling you how great you are, and you lose a little bit, because you don’t know how hard it is to repeat.”

The 49ers were able to repeat, winning again in 1990. But Haley credits his team’s focus for the achievement.

“If you’re sitting around

thinking of yourself for yesterday, how are you gonna be better tomorrow?” Haley said. “When they gave me a ring the first time, I didn’t wear it. I said, ‘I’m gonna win another one.’ And we won another one. But the next year we went to the NFC Championship game, and we lost.”

That feeling of disappointment stuck with Haley, but it didn’t change his approach to the game.

“It’s all about confidence,” he said. “People call it cocky, sometimes. But a few years later, I was in Dallas winning another Super Bowl with one of the youngest teams ever. It don’t take a room full of people to lead. It just takes a few that lead by example, and that’s what I did.”

‘MAGICAL’

As Haley methodically walked through the Pro Football Hall of Fame earlier this year taking in his surroundings, a wide smile covered his face. His induction comes after more than a decade of eligibility. 2015 marked the sixth time Haley made it to the fi-

nals of the voting process, and former teammates in the Hall had long championed Haley’s inclusion.

“I got depressed a bit,” Haley admitted of the long wait to join pro football’s elite. “But this is magical. And they can’t cut me! They can’t even tell me to go home! Individual awards have never been one of the things I believed in. I believed in team, but God, I have a new team, all the guys in the Hall of Fame.”

And it all started with that divine intervention that Haley said guided him toward his football path.

“God has blessed me more than I can ever say,” he said. “This is just like winning a Super Bowl. When you win a Super Bowl, everybody worships you. When you go into the Hall of Fame, it’s the same thing.”

“I’m gonna be humble and proud to be part of this group. Part of the 2015 class of the NFL Hall of Fame, baby!” ■

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HALEY NOTEBOOK

The ones that got away



MARINO



SANDERS

Haley was as feared a defensive player as anyone in NFL history, and there weren't many offenses he didn't wreak havoc on. But there were two players he was never able to grasp during his 12-year career. "The two people I never got a chance to tackle were Barry Sanders, and I never got to sack Dan Marino," Haley said. "Each time I see those guys now, I go up and give them a forearm hug, and they go 'Man, why do you do that every time I see you?' I go, 'because I couldn't tackle or sack you when I played, so I can do it now!'"

Walsh's tirade

When Haley was drafted by the 49ers, the team was in a rebuilding mode. At least, according to the newspapers. Head coach Bill Walsh was having none of that.

WALSH

"Bill Walsh came in and told us everyone said we were in rebuilding mode," Haley recalled. "He came in with a bunch of newspapers and threw them on the floor, and yelled 'I don't know what they're all thinking, but we're gonna win now!' Two years after that we won our first Super Bowl. The head coach set the tone, and I'm honored to have been around head coaches that have been doing that all my life."

Another honor for Haley? That he joins his late, former coach in Canton.

"Bill Walsh is here, baby. Bill Walsh is here," Haley said with a smile.



Re-evaluating his career

Few offensive linemen ever got the best of Haley, but Rams Hall of Fame offensive tackle Jackie Slater certainly gave him a challenge.

"I tried to bull rush Slater," Haley recalled. "He head butted me down to the ground. I saw Jesus Christ in all three forms! He helped me re-evaluate whether I wanted to be a football player or not. I went to the end of the bench, put my head in my hands, and I said, 'OK God, do I really want to do this?' I had never been hit like that before. But God told me to pull my head out of my butt, and let's go."

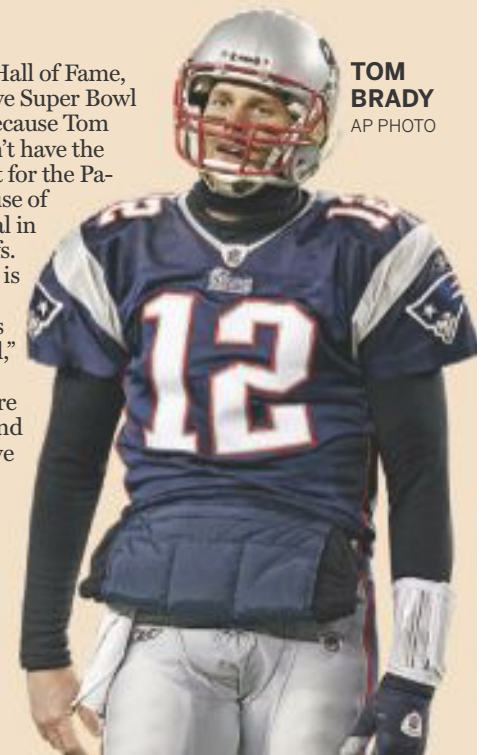


AP PHOTO

Tainted Tom?

Haley made it to the Hall of Fame, in part, because of his five Super Bowl rings. But he said just because Tom Brady has four, he doesn't have the same measure of respect for the Patriots quarterback because of the ball-deflating scandal in last season's AFC playoffs.

"When your integrity is challenged in the game of football, to me, all his Super Bowls are tainted," Haley said. "I could be wrong, but I realize there were 12 balls deflated and 12 that ain't. Then you've got (Patriots coach) Bill Belichick coming on three different times to try to explain it. You know something is wrong. Hopefully, they'll come out and let us know what really happened. Then all the mystery is gone."

TOM BRADY
AP PHOTO

Mom's warning

When Haley was drafted by the 49ers in 1986, he got a stern warning from his mother.

"I was gonna get a \$60K signing bonus, and I told my mom," Haley said. "She said, 'Don't screw it up, and don't come home!' I didn't have any other options. I love my mom, and what she says, I believe 100 percent."

B.J. LISKO

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Haley able to get on the right path

Was traveling on 'road of destruction' before getting help for bipolar disorder

BY B.J. LISKO

Repository staff writer

Author Jeff Pearlman penned "Boys Will Be Boys: The Glory Days and Party Nights of the Dallas Cowboys Dynasty" in 2008.

In it, Pearlman described an out-of-control Charles Haley taking a swing at San Francisco head coach George Seifert, urinating on 49ers teammate Tim Harris' BMW and the often lewd gestures and comments Haley made in the 49ers and Cowboys locker rooms.

It wasn't the first time stories of a wild Haley had made the rounds.

Arguably the 49ers' best defensive player during their back-to-back Super Bowl victories in the 1988 and '89 seasons, Haley was famously traded to NFC rival Dallas. It appeared the 49ers couldn't control their star lineman.

"I was angry," Haley said. "I was mean. I was hateful. I hurt people."

It wasn't until after he retired that Haley was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Patients with the affliction can undergo high and low mood swings that last for months at a time. Many will experience manic episodes in which they engage in risky behavior, racing thoughts and seemingly uncontrollable energy. Some develop depression and withdraw socially.

During his playing days, Haley was often looked at as a wild card with a wilder personality.

His teammates and head coach in San Francisco, however, were already trying to help Haley let go of playing intensity when he came off the field.

"Bill Walsh was amazing," Haley said.

"He took an angry, out-of-control man and taught him how to think, how to be smart. I appreciate that more than anything."

Walsh's approach was unlike that of any other coach or authority figure Haley had encountered.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ San Francisco 49ers General Manager Bill Walsh (left) shakes Charles Haley's hand after Haley signed a four-year contract to rejoin the 49ers in 1999. Haley, who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, credits Walsh for helping him learn how to deal with his illness.

"The way he taught me was, he never told me what to do," Haley said. "By not telling me what to do, there were consequences to my actions, and I did not like that at all. One day, after I did something stupid, he came over and was going to give me a fine. I said, 'Tell me what to do.' And he started walking away. And he said, 'You never asked.'"

That moment was something of a revelation for Haley.

"It donned on me that if I asked for help, it was there for me. That changed my whole

outlook in life. I'm not afraid to ask anyone anymore for help, because he showed me."

Soon after retirement, Haley did start asking for help. Without the full-time distraction of football, Haley was forced to look at his past actions.

"I left a road of destruction," he said. "And it wasn't just on the football field. I knew I was different, but I wouldn't admit there was anything the matter with me."

Haley's ex-wife Karen suspected he was bipolar and brought it to his attention in

"It's been a blessing to change and see things for the first time. I have joy. A lot of people in my life put in a little bit of something into the soup that made me stronger. I didn't get here by myself."

CHARLES HALEY

the early '90s, but Haley dismissed the notion.

Haley's 49er teammate Michael Carter also knew something was seriously wrong, and it culminated in a locker room confrontation between the lineman and Seifert. After taking a swing at his head coach and unleashing a verbal tirade against quarterback Steve Young, Haley punched out a glass door.

"Then he started bawling like a baby," Carter told the San Francisco Examiner.

"We knew something was wrong then. He kind of went off the deep end."

After years of struggling with his emotions, Haley found solace in therapy, medicine and personal resolve.

But it didn't come without a price. It took 11 years for Haley's Pro Football Hall of Fame induction. His past battles in the locker room and with sports writers left a lingering effect.

"You have to look at it like this," Haley said. "I can't have one foot in the past and move forward. I've made mistakes. Now I have the platform to talk to kids about the mistakes I've made so they won't make those

same mistakes. There's two ways to learn, from somebody else's mistake or your own. My mistakes hurt me, but somebody else's don't. They can learn better from hearing what I've been through."

Carter said he and his 49ers teammates always knew the kind of person Haley was, even if sometimes it was hard to spot through his layers of emotion.

"Beneath the hard exterior, there's a kinder person there," Carter said. "We saw that. With other people, he gave the crazy Charles Haley. But we saw the difference."

Now, as a newly inducted Hall of Famer, Haley is committed to showing the world what his teammates knew all along.

"Every day, I wake up trying to redefine who Charles Haley is," he said.

"It's been a blessing to change and see things for the first time. I have joy. A lot of people in my life put a little bit of something into the soup that made me stronger. I didn't get here by myself." ■

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Outworking the competition

Determination to be the best pushed Haley to five Super Bowl titles, place in Canton

BY B.J. LISKO

Repository staff writer

Forget raw athleticism. Charley Haley is all about hard work.

"I hate athletic kids," Haley quipped. "Because they don't work hard. They're athletic, and they think that's enough to make them great, and it's not."

As a newly inducted Pro Football Hall of Famer, Haley knows a thing or two about hard work. The only player in NFL history with five Super Bowl rings to his credit, a five-time Pro Bowler and one of the most feared defensive players in league history, since retirement, Haley has turned much of his focus to helping young athletes learn the game that he still so desperately loves.

Haley often speaks at his alma mater, James Madison, and he annually heads the J&B Outreach Youth Football Clinic in his native Dallas. He and former teammates Russell Maryland, Tony Tolbert and Nate Newton routinely work at teaching the game to their sons. He also often talks with NFL prospects transitioning into the league.

For Haley, it's a way to help instill some of the values he picked up along the way from the likes of some of his NFL head coaches, such as Bill



■ Dallas Cowboys head coach Jimmy Johnson is doused in Gatorade by Charles Haley following a victory against the San Francisco 49ers in the 1994 NFC Championship Game. The Cowboys went on to defeat the Buffalo Bills 30-13 to win the Super Bowl. Haley won five Super Bowls (two in San Francisco, three in Dallas) in his Hall of Fame career.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Walsh and Jimmy Johnson, as well as his mentor, Challee McMillen, his head coach at James Madison.

"What I tell every young man walking into the NFL, is whatever you did before is not enough when you step into the NFL," Haley said. "Everybody's fast. Everybody's strong. You've got to bring a little something different."

Haley certainly did that in his 12-year career where he had only one losing season. For the all-time Super Bowl sacks leader, it all started on the practice field.

"I was so determined," Haley recalled. "I was determined to

be the best."

So much so, it often put him in bad favor short-term with his teammates.

"If my conditioning coach would say do this 10 times, I'd say, 'This is it? This is all you got?'" Haley said. "We'd end up doing it 15 times. I would push him, and it would push my teammates. They would get mad at me. So what? At the end of the day, that's what it takes to win."

One teammate who didn't get mad was Hall of Fame quarterback Troy Aikman, who long has championed Haley's inclusion into the Hall.

"If there's ever a guy deserving of the Hall of Fame, it's Charles Haley," Aikman said in an interview with 1310-AM in Dallas. "I don't say this very often, because I don't like getting into whether guys should or shouldn't be in, but he's very deserving. He was not only a part of five championships, he was a huge part as to why those teams won those championships."

McMillen knew Haley's work ethic was something special at

James Madison.

"He was a great leader and a great example by what he did," McMillen said. "He was a very dedicated athlete who accepted challenges and responsibilities, and he was extremely hard-working. You could count on him to go really hard. He encouraged his teammates on and off the field. The important thing is not only does he have the (Super Bowl) rings, he played a huge part in the games."

Haley does his best to outline to youth players and NFL prospects alike what it takes to succeed at a championship level. While his natural drive might be hard for players to completely understand and grasp, he also preaches "controlling what you can control."

"The first-round guys that come into the league, there's so much pressure on them from the outside," Haley said. "But they put it on themselves from the inside. You can't put any pressure on me from the outside. I have to do that, and I tell them the love of the game will keep any pressure off you.

You've gotta continue to live and breathe this game."

Through helping aspiring athletes and now as a member of the Hall, Haley gets to do just that.

"This is the greatest game on earth," he said. "I would've played for free. I got to do something I loved, and I'm still around the game I'm so passionate for. Look at me. I'm in the Hall of Fame. I tell every guy, if you want this, your work ethic has to come 100 times from where it was before, and you gotta dream big. You gotta have enough man in you to verbalize it out loud. Nobody wants to say, 'I'm gonna win a Super Bowl,' because they don't wanna be accountable for it. Me, there was no worry."

It's a confidence that helped Haley achieve his five rings and his place in football immortality.

"I'm in the NFL Hall of Fame," he said with a smile. "You don't get no better than this!" ■

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Bill POLIAN

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From Buffalo and Carolina to Indianapolis, the architect of dreams laid the blueprint for winning — and unearthed multiple Hall of Fame players — at every stop

STORIES BY CLIFF HICKMAN

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Fans in every NFL city dream of having a Super Bowl contender. Few in the front offices around the league possess the skills to actually build one.

Even fewer have the ability to do so on a consistent basis.

That's what makes 2015 Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinee Bill Polian special. Whether it was with Buffalo during the height of its power, an expansion franchise in Carolina or an upstart Indianapolis team, Polian left a legacy of winning wherever he has been. Polian truly was the architect of dreams.

"Bill was somebody who gave everybody a shot," ESPN personality and former undrafted Indianapolis Colts center Jeff Saturday said. "He was somebody who always wanted the best players on the field. He was not afraid to let go of guys he drafted if somebody came along that was better on the field. He didn't have an ego."

That lack of ego made Polian respected throughout the league and by his coaches and players.

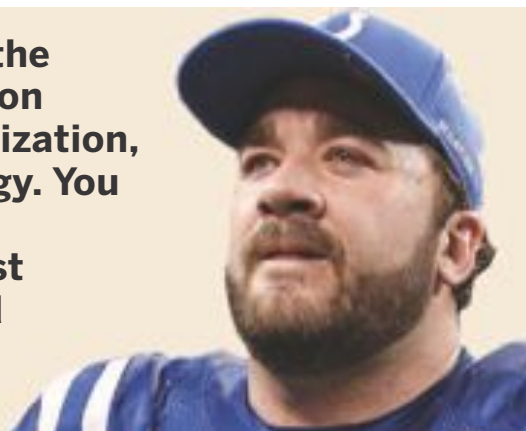
"When we were negotiating my first significant contract, he talked to me like a father would talk to his son," Saturday said. "He was a very honest and straightforward person to deal with."

His players and coaches appreciated that for all his skill when it came to building teams; he was not a micromanager.

"Bill would address the team once a year before the season began," Saturday

"Bill would address the team once a year before the season began. He would say that from this point on there was only going to be one voice in the organization, and that voice was going to be coach (Tony) Dungy. You never heard things in the media from him. His philosophy was to give the coaching staff the best players for what they did and step aside. He liked building around systems."

FORMER INDIANAPOLIS COLTS CENTER JEFF SATURDAY (RIGHT) ON BILL POLIAN



said. "He would say that from this point on there was only going to be one voice in the organization, and that voice was going to be coach (Tony) Dungy."

"You never heard things in the media from him. His philosophy was to give the coaching staff the best players for what they did and step aside. He liked building around systems."

Those traits made so many former colleagues happy to see Polian get the call from the Hall of Fame earlier this year — including his longtime head coach in Buffalo, Marv Levy, who will be his presenter in Canton.

"He's not just a former co-worker of mine; we are great friends as well," Levy told ESPN in July. "His contributions to the game have been magnificent and I have the opportunity to be his presenter."

BUILDING BUFFALO

Polian's career as the top decision maker in Buffalo began under ominous circumstances in February 1985. Then-Bills general manager Terry Bledsoe suffered a massive heart attack and was sidelined indefinitely.

Having had prior experience negotiating contracts in the Canadian Football League, the Bills turned to Polian and chief college scout Norm Pollom to split negotiating duties as Buffalo embarked on one of the most important offseasons in the history of the franchise.

There was no easing into the job for Polian. His first task was to negotiate a contract with Virginia Tech defensive end Bruce Smith. Buffalo wanted to make Smith the first overall pick in the upcoming NFL Draft, but the football landscape was radically different at the time.

The USFL was still in business and along with a then-aggressive CFL had already poached two top Buffalo draft picks in recent years. The Bills lost Tom Cousineau to the CFL in 1979 and famously Jim Kelly to the USFL in 1983. It was a trend owner Ralph Wilson wanted to see end, and he had just the man for the job in Polian.

That didn't mean it would be easy. "It was a different world," Polian said. "As the first player taken in the draft, we knew we were going to have to pay him a king's ransom. The first thing we had to do was sit down with Bruce and his agent and convince him why he should come to Buffalo. Baltimore was very close to where he grew up and that was a draw for him."

SEE POLIAN 28

POLIAN

CONTINUED FROM 27

The meeting went well. Smith came away impressed with Polian and his plans for the future and negotiations ended with Smith signing a then-massive four-year \$2.6 million deal to come to Buffalo.

"I think the fact I had a track record of negotiating contracts before helped in that situation," Polian said. "I think Bruce and his agent respected the fact that they weren't dealing with a neophyte. We were able to reach an agreement and that was the start of the foundation of our Super Bowl teams in Buffalo."

It was the start of the process but not the end. Bigger moments were to come and soon. Just a few months later during the 1985 draft, Polian would make a franchise-changing trade with Cleveland. It enabled the Browns to draft Bernie Kosar in the supplemental draft as a result and the Bills ended up with draft picks that netted them Hall of Fame receiver Andre Reed and reliable backup quarterback Frank Reich, as the deal shaped the future fortunes of both teams (see Page 29).

Those were undoubtedly big moments but the biggest moment was yet to come. In 1986, Polian helped convince the prodigal son Kelly to join the fold (see Page 30) after the USFL finally fell apart.

That same year, Marv Levy was hired as head coach. The pair of future Hall of Famers had a shared history, as Levy and Polian had worked together with the Montreal Alouettes in the CFL and the Chicago Blitz in the USFL.

The pairing of Levy and Polian would propel Buffalo to unheard-of heights. The Bills would make a record four straight Super Bowl appearances from 1991 to 1994. Unfortunately, Buffalo lost each time.

"Losing a Super Bowl is the worst," Polian said. "It's actually worse than losing your job. My thought is you can always get another job, but you may never get another shot at a Super Bowl. It's just a terrible feeling. I was determined not to let it define my life though."

Though Polian lost his job after the third Super Bowl loss, it remains an unforgettable era

Legendary Bills

Bill Polian, the architect of Buffalo Bills teams that reached four Super Bowls in the early 1990s, becomes the eighth member of Hall of Fame affiliated with the team during that run:

- **Ralph C. Wilson Jr.**, owner, Class of 2009
- **Bill Polian**, general manager, Class of 2015
- **Marv Levy**, head coach, Class of 2001
- **Jim Kelly**, quarterback, Class of 2002
- **James Lofton***, wide receiver, Class of 2003
- **Thurman Thomas**, running back, Class of 2007
- **Bruce Smith**, defensive end, Class of 2009
- **Andre Reed**, wide receiver, Class of 2014

*Lofton was inducted into the Hall of Fame as a member of the Green Bay Packers.

in Buffalo football. An era that still resonates with Bills fans to this day.

"You have to understand what the Bills mean to Buffalo," Polian said. "They are a 365-day-a-year, seven-day-a-week phenomenon. The teams we had took on a persona in the city that has never really been erased. They've taken on legendary status. There were so many incredible games mixed with so much heartbreak.

"It was just a case of the right team, right coach and right town."

CAROLINA COOKING

Polian's next career move would be far different from anything he encountered the rest of his career: Building an expansion team from the ground up.

"There was no history," Polian said. "No ownership even at the time. (Charlotte) was really a college town. As a result, we were starting completely from scratch."

The start of the Carolina franchise also marked a change in the way the NFL was going to do business league-wide. The salary cap was on the way in — something that would ultimately go on to benefit Polian and the Panthers.

"I was part of the group that helped the NFL put the salary cap together," Polian said. "(2015 Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinee) Ron Wolf was also part of the process. I quickly realized that if we only took the charges from the expansion draft and the NFL Draft that we were going to have plenty of cap room to sign free agents.

"Ron, very astutely, noticed the same thing and argued to the league that what we were doing was unfair. Ultimately, we prevailed in the argument

and we were able to build a good team quickly by signing largely battle-ready free agents."

That initial group of free agents included Reich at QB, linebacker Sam Mills, wide receiver Mark Carrier and tight end Pete Metzelaars. The Panthers also drafted quarterback Kerry Collins and cornerback Tyrone Poole, who would go on to be big contributors for the young franchise.

The team was to be coached by a familiar face locally: University of Mount Union graduate Dom Capers.

"Dom was exactly the right coach for that situation," Polian said. "He turned a group of strangers into a team quickly. We far exceeded all expectations right from the start."

Carolina went 7-9 that first year but the best was yet to come. The Panthers went on another spending spree that offseason that saw them add star linebacker Kevin Greene, cornerback Eric Davis, wide receiver Raghob Ismail and tight end Wesley Walls. The Panthers also drafted another key contributor in wide receiver Muhsin Muhammad. The result? A 12-4 record and a trip to the NFC Championship.

"Our defense was basically all veterans except for a couple of guys," Polian said. "You have to do what the circumstances dictate though. We ended up having a great year in 1996. We ended up knocking off Dallas to reach the NFC Championship game. We lost to Green Bay who went on to win the Super Bowl."

OFF TO INDY

Polian's quick success in Carolina earned him a promotion after two seasons. He was hired by Indianapolis to be the new president and general manager with the Colts.

Polian was once again con-

fronted with a franchise-defining decision upon taking over in Indianapolis. The Colts had the No. 1 pick in the draft and there were two top prospects that had the entire football world talking, quarterbacks Peyton Manning and Ryan Leaf. Polian ended up making the correct decision and taking Manning (see Page 30), ushering in an unparalleled era of success for the Colts.

The final piece to the Super Bowl puzzle in Indianapolis would arrive in January 2002. That month marked the arrival of Dungy, who took over for Jim Mora.

"Jim Mora had done a great job of establishing a strong work ethic," Polian said. "Because of the salary cap though, we had a lot of our cap dollars invested on the offensive side of the ball. We needed somebody who was going to be willing to work with young players on defense because of that and that was something that Tony loved to do."

Dungy brought with him the "Tampa 2" defense and a template for what he wanted in his young defense — speed, quickness, heart and a relentless motor.

"We started to take players that fit with his style of defense," Polian said. "We focused on players like Robert Mathis and Dwight Freeney along the defensive line that some considered undersized. They didn't play that way though, and Tony put together a great defense and made us a genuine contender for a long time."

After years of being perennial contenders and being on the cusp of a championship, Polian and Dungy finally got their big break in 2007 when the Colts reached Super Bowl XLI against the Chicago Bears in Miami.

It was a rain-soaked night in Florida but for the Colts franchise, it was a beautiful evening. After so much heartache, so many close calls, so many tough losses, Polian finally got his Super Bowl ring. The Colts downed the Bears 29-17.

"It was great to win that game," Polian said. "I think I was happier for the organization than I was for myself though. I was happy for Jim Irsay and a lot of the longtime employees that at times hadn't seen a lot of success. For me, the world wasn't going to end

one way or another. I was going to come back and do my job the same way, win or lose."

Polian was relieved of his duties after a 2-14 finish in January 2012. Manning was on the shelf the entire season with an arm injury. It ended up being the final year in the franchise for Polian and Manning.

SPORTSCENTER NEXT AND ON TO THE HALL

Polian shortly resurfaced as a television personality on network power ESPN. His thoughtful and direct approach quickly made him as beloved by viewers as he was by owners during his time as a front-office executive.

"I enjoy it a great deal," Polian said. "It's terrific. I've learned a lot about management and culture from my time at ESPN. They've been terrific to me. It's something that keeps me active. I consider myself to be a football lifer and it's a job that keeps me in that arena."

Watching Polian work on set as an analyst has been just as enjoyable for one of Polian's former players as it has been for him.

"I call the guy you see on TV 'Grandpa Bill,'" Saturday said with a laugh. "He has a very different demeanor than he did when he was in the front office. ... When he was on the field he could get fired up. You would see him simmer and his face turn red at times."

Polian's unparalleled success and unique experiences make him a figure worth listening to every time he speaks.

"He's a teacher at heart," Saturday said. "He loves to educate, and he will tell you real stories from his past to illustrate his points. ... He's been a great addition. He's a student of the game, and he understands every facet of the game."

Earlier this year, Polian was working for ESPN at the Super Bowl when he got the call from Pro Football Hall of Fame President and Executive Director David Baker about being elected to the Hall.

"I was speechless," Polian said. "I was just speechless. I never presumed anything like this would ever happen. It wasn't something that was in the forefront of my mind. I was just stunned." ■

Win-win: Bernie for Andre Reed



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

BY CLIFF HICKMAN
Repository sports writer

There are few trades that would shape the landscape of professional football league-wide in the 1980s more than a 1985 trade between the Buffalo Bills and the Cleveland Browns.

The Browns badly wanted to find a way to acquire former Boardman High School quarterback Bernie Kosar who was leaving the University of Miami, while Buffalo was looking to add draft picks. Both found a way to make it work.

"Thank goodness we were dealing with Ernie Accorsi who was one of the most honorable men you will ever meet," former Bills general manager Bill Polian said. "We ended up getting Cleveland's first-round draft picks in 1985 and 1986, their third-round pick in 1985 and their sixth-round pick in 1986 for our first-round pick in 1986."

Why would Cleveland acquire Buffalo's first-round pick in 1986 when Kosar was going pro in 1985? Kosar had held off filing his paperwork for the 1985 NFL Draft so he could

avoid going to Minnesota. He was determined to enter the supplemental draft a few weeks later in 1985, and a team drafting him there would lose the same corresponding draft pick in the next year's regular draft.

This is why Buffalo's draft pick was so important. The supplemental draft order is based on the previous year's finish. Since the Bills had the No. 1 pick in 1985, their supplemental draft pick would also be No. 1 overall — meaning no one could cut in line to beat Cleveland to Kosar.

Meanwhile, Buffalo was examining the options it now had with the extra picks. Polian had already signed Bruce Smith ahead of making him the top pick in the 1985 draft.

"We weren't doing well at the time," Polian said. "I went to head coach Kay Stephenson and said, 'Hey, maybe we can trade these choices for some veterans and get a heck of a lot better quickly and save our jobs.' His response was 'No, our obligation was to do the right thing for the franchise.' I'll never forget that."

It was a move that would ultimately end up costing Stephenson his job, but one that proved extremely profitable in the long run for Buffalo fans.

"That move allowed us the room to acquire Andre Reed and Frank Reich to go with Bruce Smith in 1985," Polian said.

Reed would go on to have a career that got him enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2014.

Reich would be one of the most dependable backup quarterbacks in NFL history. His most notable accomplishment was "The Comeback" in a Jan. 3, 1993 playoff game against Houston. Reich guided Buffalo back from a 35-3 deficit in the third quarter to win 41-38 in overtime.

The deal worked out for Cleveland as well. Kosar went on to take the Browns to three AFC title games before injuries and poor drafts took their toll on the franchise. ■

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■ A trade between the Buffalo Bills and Cleveland Browns in 1985 netted the Browns QB Bernie Kosar and the Bills landed Hall of Fame wide receiver Andre Reed and quarterback Frank Reich.

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■ Quarterbacks Peyton Manning (right) and Ryan Leaf meet following a Colts' 17-12 win in 1998. Manning was selected first in the 1998 draft while Leaf was taken at No. 2. Bill Polian's decision to go with Manning proved to be the right one as Manning is a sure-fire first-ballot Hall of Famer, while Leaf was out of the league by 2001 and was recently released from a Montana prison.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO



Choosing wisely

Polian always had Peyton Manning ranked above Ryan Leaf as top prospect in the 1998 NFL Draft

BY CLIFF HICKMAN

Repository sports writer

Big decisions were a way of life for 2015 Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinee Bill Polian regardless of his team.

Few choices would go on to determine a franchise's future as much his first draft in Indianapolis in 1998, though. Upon arriving with the Colts, Polian had to make a big decision with the No. 1 pick.

Tennessee QB Peyton Manning and Washington State QB Ryan Leaf were the options. It was a hotly contested debate around the country.

"When I got to Indianapolis, the scouts were split down the middle on them," Polian said. "I said, 'We're going to start from scratch. We're going to go back over all the tape and come to a decision.'"

The more tape Polian and the scouts watched, the more they became convinced Manning was the man to lead the franchise forward.

"By mid-March we felt Peyton had a leg up," Polian said. "It was pretty significant actually. It became very clear after going back over things that Peyton was the best choice. The coaching staff of Jim Mora, Bruce Arians and Tom Moore all agreed. I certainly felt that way. We also had Bill Walsh look at tape and he came back soundly in Peyton's corner."

Polian and Indianapolis became only more entrenched in

the Manning camp as the draft process played out.

"There was a contrast between the two at the combine," Polian said. "Ryan canceled and was a no-show for his interview. Peyton came on time and pulled out a legal pad with 25 questions for us. We talked and we told each other that we felt it was a good discussion."

"After he left, I turned and looked at the scouting staff and said, 'I think he just interviewed us.' That's all you need to know about the preparation of Peyton Manning."

The decision was made far in advance, though you wouldn't have known it listening to sports radio in the lead-up to the draft at the time.

"There were all these myths out there about Peyton leading up to the draft," Polian said.

"There were things out there that said he was a bad athlete. That he had a bad arm. That he was the product of the system in Tennessee and that Ryan was the better competitor. In pri-

vate workouts, I'm not talking about pro day workouts, I mean sessions with our staff, it became clear that Peyton was the superior athlete with the better arm. Those were wives' tales with no basis in fact."

That didn't stop the myths from persisting, even after the draft.

"That stuff hung around in the preseason," Polian said. "They played against each other then and Ryan got the better of the play so that debate cropped up again. By Thanksgiving that year, though, it became apparent that Peyton was starting to thrive and Ryan was struggling mightily."

The rest, as they say, is history. Manning went on to deliver the Colts a Super Bowl and is one of the greatest quarterbacks ever. Leaf and his perceived competitive and athletic edge just completed a prison sentence in Montana. ■

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Winning over Jim Kelly

Jim Kelly, Los Angeles Raider?

If the Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback had initially gotten his way, we might be talking about Kelly as one of the greatest players to ever wear the silver and black as opposed to one of the greatest players to ever wear Buffalo's red and blue.

Kelly had famously avoided Buffalo once by electing to join the Houston Gamblers in the USFL after being drafted by the Bills in 1983. Playing in the cold with a team that had no history of success did not appeal to Kelly in the least when he was picked.

The fact that Buffalo still held Kelly's rights from the famed 1983 NFL draft would come into play in a big way when Polian soon got a call from

the star quarterback's agents.

"They called me up and said, 'We're prepared to go to the Raiders, but we'll let you make your pitch,'" Polian said. "I told them, 'First of all, he can't go to the Raiders because we hold his draft rights. Second of all, I'm prepared to make my pitch.'"

Polian traveled to meet with the quarterback who had initially bristled at the thought of playing in Buffalo's cold. Kelly had also initially doubted that the Bills would put a team capable of contending for the Super Bowl around him.

Polian was able to change Kelly's mind once they met. He let Kelly know that the Bills were serious about putting together a team that could win annually.

"The discussion in that meeting was purely about football," Polian said. "It went really well. At the end of the meeting, Jim decided that he wanted to be in Buffalo."

CLIFF HICKMAN



AP PHOTO

'Fatherly advice'

Players and decision makers always say that the NFL is a business and that the bottom line drives everything. That may be true to an extent. There are smokescreens, swerves and all manners of threats that get made during the offseason.

There are general managers such as 2015 Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinee Bill Polian, though, who conducted business a different way. Just ask ESPN personality and former Indianapolis Pro Bowl center Jeff Saturday.

"Bill just asked, 'What do you want?'" Saturday said. "He said, 'Do you want to be the highest-paid center in the NFL? You are going to be a Colt. I'm not letting you leave. For this to work, though, you have to tell me what you want.'"

As Saturday pondered his answer, Polian gave him some

"fatherly advice."

"He said 'the one thing I will tell you is don't make a GM cut you. If you tell me you want to be the highest-paid center in the game, I'll make that happen. You have to play to that every single year, though, or it's going to be extremely difficult to keep you with the cap.'"

The response Saturday gave next is one of the reasons he was able to spend his entire career with one team.

"I told him, 'I don't care about being the highest-paid center,'" Saturday said. "I hadn't been to a Pro Bowl at that point. So we sat down and pulled out a list of every center in the league. We went through all of them until I hit a guy and said, 'I know I'm better than this guy, I feel like I need to make more than him. That's what I want.' Bill said, 'I agree.'"

CLIFF HICKMAN

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CANTON'S CLASS OF 2015

Junior SEAU

The easygoing linebacker from California can be summed up in a few words. But those words don't do his incredible journey justice in a story that ended far too early.

STORIES BY CLIFF HICKMAN

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BY CLIFF HICKMAN

Repository sports writer

Hard hits. Big smiles. Lots of wins. A large heart. And plenty of ukulele strumming in between.

That's a simplistic view of legendary linebacker and 2015 Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinee Junior Seau.

But those few words don't do proper justice to a legendary career and a life that came to an end far before its time. Those words don't tell the story of all the blood, sweat and tears he gave to the game he loved for more than 20 years or the spark he provided to the San Diego community and his family off the field.

Junior Seau's story is about a man who gave everything he had on the field and off the field for others, and never asked anything in return. Now, a sport and a community feel a loss since his suicide in 2012 — he suffered from the type of chronic brain damage found in many deceased former players — that can never be adequately put into words.

"I would have never expected him to have anything like that," his daughter, Sydney Seau, told PBS in 2013. "Like, you're a football player. Why do you need a gun? No one's going to, like (give you trouble), who's not intimidated by you? There's something no one saw coming. There's just no words."

No words. But plenty of memories. "What can you say about Junior?" for-

Junior Seau by the numbers

243 Games started. That is the second most by a linebacker in league history, behind only former Cleveland Browns and Atlanta Falcons standout Clay Matthews.

64 Number of times Seau recorded 10 or more tackles in a game.

20 Number of seasons Seau played, an NFL record for a defensive player.

12 Number of Pro Bowl appearances, tied with six others — including fellow 2015 Hall of Famer Will Shields — for ninth all-time.



mer San Diego Chargers coach June Jones said. "Junior was magic."

The type of magic the game had never quite seen before and may never see again.

A REGULAR GUY

Though Seau was one of the biggest stars in the NFL throughout his career, he never acted like it off the field. Seau conducted himself with a level of class and humility lacking in some of today's "me-first" athletes.

"He was just Dad," Sydney Seau, who will be her father's presenter for the enshrinement, told PBS in 2013. "There was

no football stardom. The first time I actually realized he was a big deal is when I brought him to show-and-tell in kindergarten. It was like 'D is for,' and I was like, 'Dad.'

"So I brought him to show-and-tell and he came in. Everyone was making a huge deal and asking for his autograph. I'm like: 'Why would you want this guy's autograph? I'm so confused.'"

LONG HOURS

That stardom and recognition wasn't by happenstance. Twenty-year careers that include 12 consecutive Pro Bowl berths don't just happen. Those types of careers

are forged through hard work and determination. That includes working while the rest of your competition is sleeping.

"I'll tell you a story about the kind of leader Junior was for us," Jones said. "I had just taken over and I wanted to change things up. I liked to practice earlier in the day and I would actually get to the building around 4 a.m. most days.

"I remember pulling up most days and seeing Junior's vehicle already in the parking lot. He would already be in the film room watching tape before I even got in. That's the type of work ethic he had."

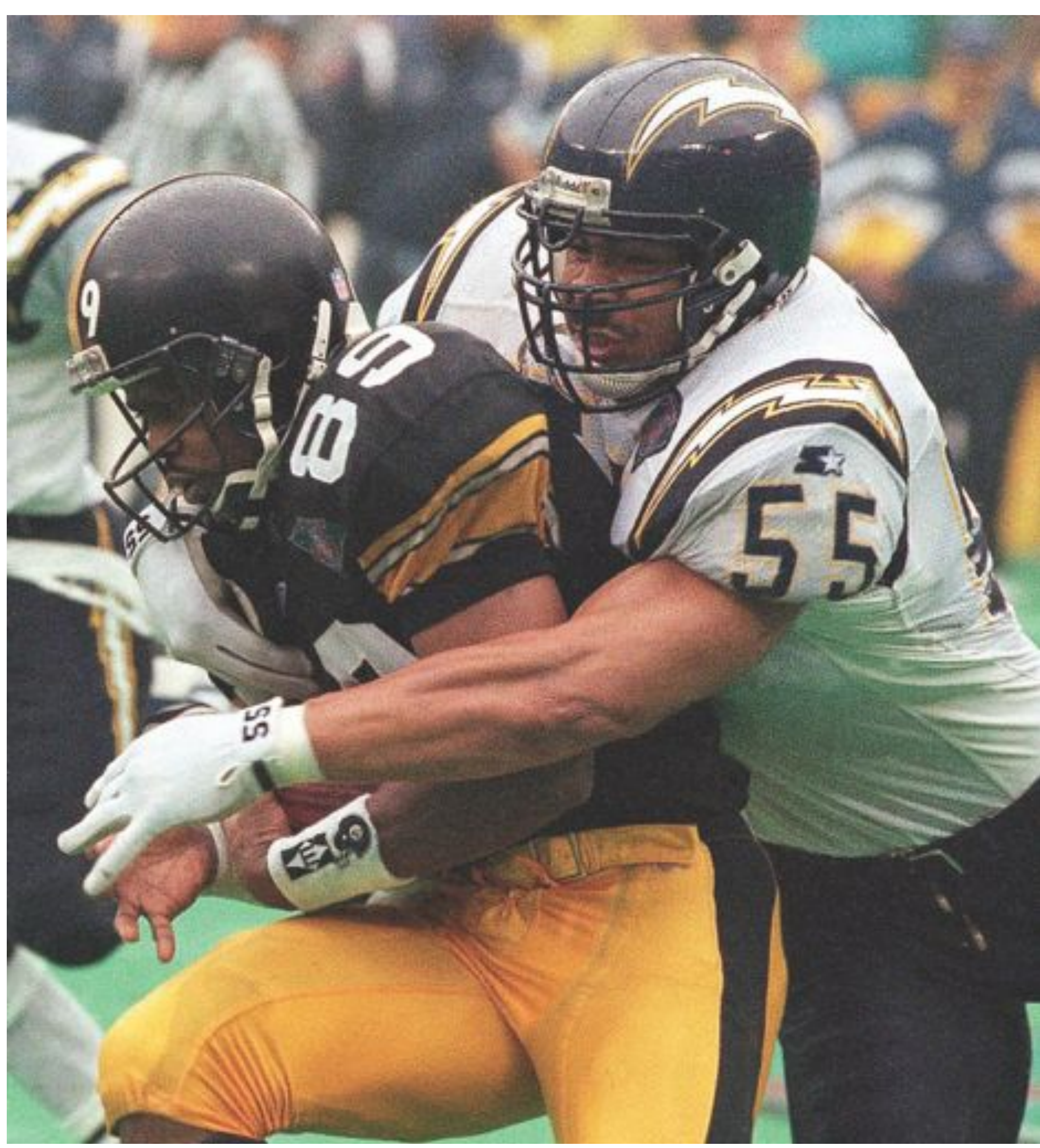
Seau also was an impressive force in the weight room. Another of the factors that helped him survive so long in the game he loved.

"I think his incredible workout routine is what kept him ahead for so many years," Jones said. "I used to watch him go through it and it was stunning. The only thing I can really compare it to is the types of things Nolan Ryan used to do. It's why those guys had two of the longest careers in all of professional sports."

THE IRRESISTIBLE FORCE

Seau's intense brand of film study and his natural physical gifts made him one of the most unique players on the field. He defeated opponents mentally as regularly as he defeated them physically.

SEE SEAU 36



SEAU

CONTINUED FROM 34

The best way to describe Seau's playing style on the field was that of a jazz musician. He was a player who would hit the notes you expected him to but there was also room for improvisation in his game that was just as beautiful for fans. And maddening for opponents.

"Most of the time he would just kind of go where he thought the ball was going," former NFL tight end Christian Fauria told the LA Times in 2012 after Seau's death. "He would disregard every bit of coverage rules and gap assignments. He would just go to where he thought the play was going, based on what he looked at, what he saw."

It was a style that could be just as frustrating for his own coaches as it was for the other team. There would be no micro-managing Seau. No controlling his every move once he stepped out onto the gridiron.

"He studied the opposing team so much during the week that he knew exactly what they were going to do during games," Jones said. "You could call plays but a lot of the time, Junior was going to do his own thing. He guessed a lot and about 95 percent of the time, he guessed right. He would anticipate plays before they would happen. It would look like he was in their huddle before the play."

"It was the type of improvisation that could drive his defensive coaches nuts. It was a skill and a trait that was very special. It's not something you can really put your finger on."

Seau was a wild card of the best kind for the Chargers. A kind that could come out of the deck at any time and completely change the tone of any game.

"I don't think there will ever be anybody who will be able to match what this guy was able to do on the football field," fellow 2015 enshrinee and longtime Oakland Raider Tim Brown told The Los Angeles Times in 2012. "He was big, fast, smart, strong and fearless. You put all that in a weak-side linebacker, and you've got somebody who's scary. For many, many years he was just that for us."

LOCKER-ROOM LEADER

Seau's play spoke volumes



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ San Diego Chargers linebacker Junior Seau sacks Los Angeles Raiders quarterback Jay Schroeder for a five-yard loss during a 1992 game in Los Angeles.

on the field. But so did his attitude off it. Seau was quick to shoot a smile in every direction and often referred to teammates as "buddy" during conversations.

"I think he loved being in the locker room and being with the guys more than he liked being on the field," Jones said. "He had the type of positive attitude that was just contagious."

Seau's teammates in San Diego, Miami and New England often described him as just that. Seau had an enthusiasm for life that seemed to make any day, any practice better.

"The intensity, the smile, the infectious attitude, it carried over to all the other guys," former San Diego quarterback Stan Humphries told ESPN in 2012 after Seau's death.

It was the type of positivity that could set an inexperienced rookie on the right path and melt the heart of a hardened veteran. There was no way to be around Seau and not be in-

fluenced.

"As a young linebacker, Junior was my hero growing up, and once I had the opportunity to meet him I saw that he was everything I hoped he would be and more," longtime Miami Dolphins linebacker Zach Thomas told ESPN in 2012. "Getting the chance to play alongside Junior Seau, the greatest linebacker to ever play the game, made my dreams come true."

It was the type of passion that rubbed off, not only on the players, but the coaching staff, the front office and even the owners.

"For four seasons, after every game he played, he would always find me in the locker room just to give me a big hug and squeeze tighter than anyone I remember," New England chairman and CEO Robert Kraft told the media in 2012 after Seau's death. "He was passionate about football and always spoke with great conviction.

He may have been one of the most charismatic Patriots players in franchise history."

GIVING BACK

Seau was just as positive a force off the field as he was on it. In 1992, he formed the Junior Seau Foundation, a public charity aimed at helping young people deal with a variety of issues throughout the San Diego community.

"The amount of things he did in the community was just mind-boggling," Jones said. "He just gave, and gave and gave. He tried to take care of everybody. He was just a really sweet-spirited guy."

One of Seau's favorite programs was "Shop with a Jock," an event that still happens annually in the San Diego area. The event features area San Diego athletes taking underprivileged Christmas shopping for their loved ones.

"There's no better gift that you can give a kid than teach-

ing them the gift of giving, and that's what this is all about," Hall of Fame running back and program participant Marshall Faulk told San Diego CBS Channel 8 in 2012.

LEGACY

The question that still haunts his family and the football community is what might have been had the events of May 2, 2012 never happened. That was the day Seau was found shot to death from a self-inflicted wound in his home at age 43.

"I was close with Junior after he retired," Jones said. "He would come out and help with camps I had when I was at Hawaii and SMU. I wanted him to get into coaching, and every year I offered him a position. In 2012, I offered him a job again and he said 'next year I'm in.' I knew being out of the game was very hard on him."

The exact reasons for why this tragedy unfolded the way it did may never be known.

"I'll always remember his personality," Jones said. "His smile and his spirit were unforgettable. Junior was always a giver. He was never a taker."

It is a day that is forever seared into the minds of friends and family members, though.

"I remember exactly what I was wearing (when I heard the news)," Sydney Seau told PBS in 2013. "I remember every teacher that came up to me and tried to console me. I remember breaking down and what friends I talked to. It's ridiculous the amount of vivid images I have in my head of that day, and I wish every day that it could be blurry and it was just hazed over and it wasn't there."

"But it's like you're feeling everything, but you're numb. And I know everyone says, 'You're just numb; you can't feel anything.' But it was by far the worst day of my life, so of course I remember everything."

A bright light extinguished. The flame doused far before its time. A sentiment that former Miami Dolphins CEO Mike Dee may have summed up best in a statement to the media in 2012.

"Junior was one of a kind. The league will never see anyone like him again." ■

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ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ New England Patriots linebacker Junior Seau returns an interception of Browns quarterback Derek Anderson during a game in 2007. Seau played four years with the Patriots from 2006 to 2009.

Patriot games

Days after a retirement bash in San Diego, Seau decided the time wasn't right to hang cleats up

BY CLIFF HICKMAN

Repository sports writer

The ink was dry on the ceremonial contract as his career seemingly came to an end before him. In 2006, Junior Seau sat in front of a crowd of reporters at San Diego Chargers' headquarters and announced his retirement.

Seau sounded convinced at the time his career was done.

"Understand when I say this," Seau told reporters. "I'm not retiring. I am graduating. Today is my graduation day. Retirement means that you'll just go ahead and live on your laurels and surf all day in Oceanside. It ain't going to happen."

Then he walked away from the game — or so it seemed. When you love something and when you are used to a routine, it's hard to just give it up. This fact, Seau knew. But it was something that would continue to gnaw at him.

His words from the injury-shortened 2005 season with

Miami became prophetic.

"I'll tell you what, there are a lot of minutes in the day," Seau told reporters in Miami. "I know that now. I definitely got a little taste of what it's going to be like when the game is done. It's something I'm not ready for."

It took less than a week for Seau to decide that he wasn't ready to go quietly into the night just yet. That decision led to making new friends and reaching new heights with the New England Patriots from 2006 to 2009.

The Patriots weren't getting a veteran player at the end of his rope just looking to play out the string, either. They got the legend they expected.

"He's a very passionate guy, lot of energy, lot of enthusiasm," New England head coach Bill Belichick told the Boston Globe in January. "He was the first guy in the building in the morning, watching film, lifting weights, ready for practice, always loved to practice, flying around on the practice field, energy before

the game on the sideline and during the game, emotional player, but a smart player."

Seau became a team favorite as he went on to record 121 tackles and 4.5 sacks in 38 games with New England over the next four years.

Seau was also a member of the 2007 Patriots team that nearly went undefeated before falling to the Giants 17-14 in the Super Bowl.

Though he did not get a Super Bowl ring, Seau earned more gratitude from an elite set of teammates.

"He was a phenomenal player, teammate, friend," New England quarterback Tom Brady told the Boston Globe in January. "His attitude was infectious.

"He had a love for life and he's missed by all of his family and friends, and certainly by me and the guys that had a chance to be around him. He was a special person." ■

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Ukulele was never far away

Seau was often found strumming away at his guitar-like instrument

BY CLIFF HICKMAN

Repository sports writer

Where Junior Seau could be found, his ukulele was often not far behind. The charismatic Seau could often be found strumming the instrument and singing away.

The question some may have is what is a ukulele? The best answer is that it is a small, guitar-like instrument that has four nylon strings. The tone of the instrument can vary with its size and the materials used to make it.

The bigger question is how did such a unique, small instrument end up so often in the hands of a massive NFL linebacker? It was a gift given to him during his final year of football in 2009.

From that point on, it was glued to his hands. Whether he could play it properly or not at first.

"He wouldn't let it go,"

Seau's daughter Sydney told the San Diego Union-Tribune in 2012. "It never ended. He was so tone deaf. He'd say 'Syd, I could've made it so big.' And I'd say, 'Dad, you're horrible!'"

Junior Seau would also often burst into song while pleasantly strumming along.

"The man could not sing," Seau's son Jake told the San Diego Tribune in 2012. "He couldn't hit the notes. But he loved it.

"In the middle of my lacrosse games, I'd look up into the stands, and there he'd be, relaxing back into the bleachers, legs spread wide open, wearing flip flops, board shorts

and tank tops. I'd laugh to myself, 'It's winter, Dad.' He'd just be strumming away, lost in his own little world."

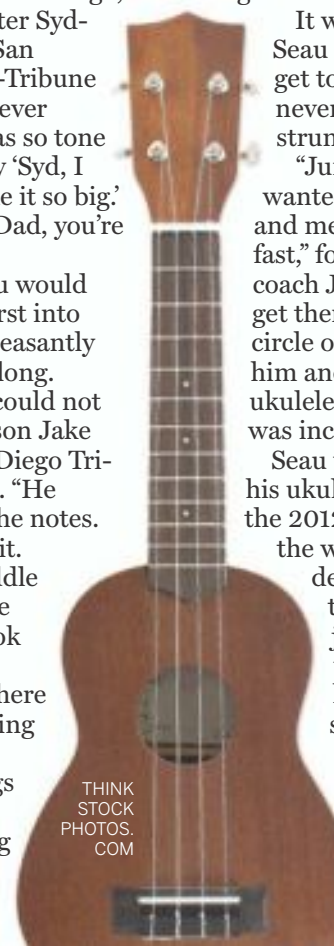
Junior Seau was dedicated to learning the instrument, though, and eventually began to impress with his ability. When challenged by U.S. Marine Corps Captain Albert Flores Jr. about his ability with the ukulele during a night out on the town, Junior Seau went to his car and returned with the instrument.

"One of the most ferocious tacklers in the history of football was playing a ukulele in an empty bar at 11 p.m. and serenading the few that remained," Flores Jr. told Deadspin in a letter in 2012. "He then started to play some more and his cousin and uncle joined in the chorus. They were a harmonic family full of melodies. ... and they were good — real good."

It was a side of Junior Seau that friends would get to see often. It was never too early for a few strums on the ukulele.

"Junior told me he wanted to get up early and meet me for breakfast," former Chargers coach June Jones said. "I get there and he's got a circle of 15 guys around him and he's playing the ukulele for everybody. It was incredible."

Seau would later play his ukulele for USC during the 2012 spring game in the weeks before his death. His association with the Trojans and the ukulele would be honored later that season in a game against Hawaii. ■



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Dark day in San Diego

Seau's death puts black cloud over usually sunny California

BY CLIFF HICKMAN

Repository sports writer

It was May 3, 2012. The sun was bright in San Diego as people gathered, but the mood was somber.

Fans and media of a tight-knit community were lining the streets to pay tribute to a favorite fallen son. They were looking for reasons ... anything to explain how one of the greatest linebackers in NFL history could take his own life.

The questions during that time only continued to grow as the crowd swelled outside the home of Junior Seau to mourn his passing.

The most indelible image was that of a heartbroken mother grieving for her son.

"I don't understand," Luisa Seau told the media in 2012. "... I pray to God, 'Take me, take me, leave my son.' But it is too late."

The news sent shockwaves around the league. Former executives, coaches and teammates all searched for a way to process an unspeakable tragedy.

"I can't put into words how I'm feeling," San Diego Chargers president Dean Spanos told NFL.com in 2012. "I'm shocked and devastated. Junior was my friend. We all lost a friend today."

Being at a loss for words wasn't something that was common at the time.

"I have no words to describe the passing of Junior Seau," former San Diego Chargers head coach Norv Turner said in a statement released to the media in 2012. "It's a sad, sad day for not only me, but for the whole sports community."



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ San Diego Chargers football fan Paul Camacho wears the uniform of Junior Seau as he stands in front of the team's headquarters on May 2, 2012, in San Diego after NFL star Junior Seau was found shot to death at his home in what was ruled a suicide. Seau was 43.

Former teammates also searched for ways to say goodbye to a man that had meant so much to them.

"It would be easy for me to say he was a great friend and teammate, and tremendous competitor, but that would be selling Junior short," former Miami Dolphin Jason Taylor

said in a statement released to the media in 2012. "Junior Seau was an individual of great honor and integrity. A leader of men and someone with a deep-rooted passion for giving of himself to make the people, the community, and especially the children around him better.

"This is an immeasurable loss for so many."

Others reached out to members of the family to ask if Seau had had any concussions over the course of his playing career. They were looking for something, anything to explain the events of the day before.

"We have no clues whatsoever," ex-wife Gina Seau told ESPN in 2012. "We're astounded and shocked as anyone else. We're horribly saddened. We miss him and we'll always love him." ■

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Study showed CTE for Seau

Linebacker's brain had suffered trauma

BY CLIFF HICKMAN

Repository sports writer

The shock of Junior Seau's untimely death lasted months. The search for answers would take even longer. After multiple organizations asked for permission to study Seau's brain, the family tasked the National Institutes of Health with conducting the study in July 2012.

The NIH released a statement to the media in January 2013 detailing the results of the study.

"The official, unanimous diagnosis of Mr. Seau's brain was a multifocal tauopathy consistent with a diagnosis of chronic traumatic encephalopathy," the statement said.

It was a clear case of CTE, according to the study.

"CTE results from blows to the head over a period of time that cause concussion," according to the Mayo Clinic Online. "These injuries lead to

difficulties with thinking (cognition), emotions and behaviors that do not become noticeable until many years later. CTE can lead to physical problems as well."

That wasn't the extent of Seau's problems, though. The study found more.

"In addition there was a very small region in the left frontal lobe of the brain with evidence of scarring that is consistent with a small, old, traumatic brain injury," the NIH said in its 2013 release to the media.

We will never know what happened to Seau in May 2012 when he committed suicide. What is clear is Seau was struggling with an unseen injury. The overall effect of that injury remains unknown, though.

"The relationship between the multifocal tauopathy form of CTE and the symptoms is poorly understood," the NIH said in its release in 2013.

"Whether and how the multifocal form of CTE progresses to the more extensive brain degeneration is still unclear."

The lack of a way to clearly diagnose CTE and the fact that there is no cure may make it one of the most dangerous injuries a person could possibly face.

"CTE research is in a very early stage," the NIH said in its 2013 media release. "Currently, physicians are unable to diagnose the multifocal tauopathy form of CTE in a living person; CTE can only be confirmed by examining the brains from individuals upon autopsy.

"No data are available to indicate the frequency of CTE. Similarly, we do not understand which individuals with multiple impacts to the head or exposures to blast injury are at risk for CTE." ■

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■ The San Diego Chargers retired Junior Seau's No. 55 in 2012 during a ceremony at Qualcomm Stadium.

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Will Shields



CANTON'S CLASS OF 2015



‘The legend is real’ when it comes to the big man from the heartland. From Nebraska to K.C., he started more games at guard than any other player in the history of the NFL.

STORIES BY CHRIS BEAVEN

Phone: 330-580-8345 Email: chris.beaven@cantonrep.com On Twitter: @cbeavenREP

Excellence takes many forms inside the Pro Football Hall of Fame. For 14 seasons in America’s heartland, excellence at offensive guard in the NFL took the shape of the 6-foot-3, 320-pound Will Shields. From 1993 to 2006 with the Kansas City Chiefs, Shields was the standard at his position.

Power. Speed. Agility.

Those were the obvious traits for all to see when watching No. 68 for the Chiefs go about his business in stadiums around the league.

Looking beyond those, though, revealed much more of what made Shields stand out ... on and off the field.

Intelligence. Work ethic. Character.

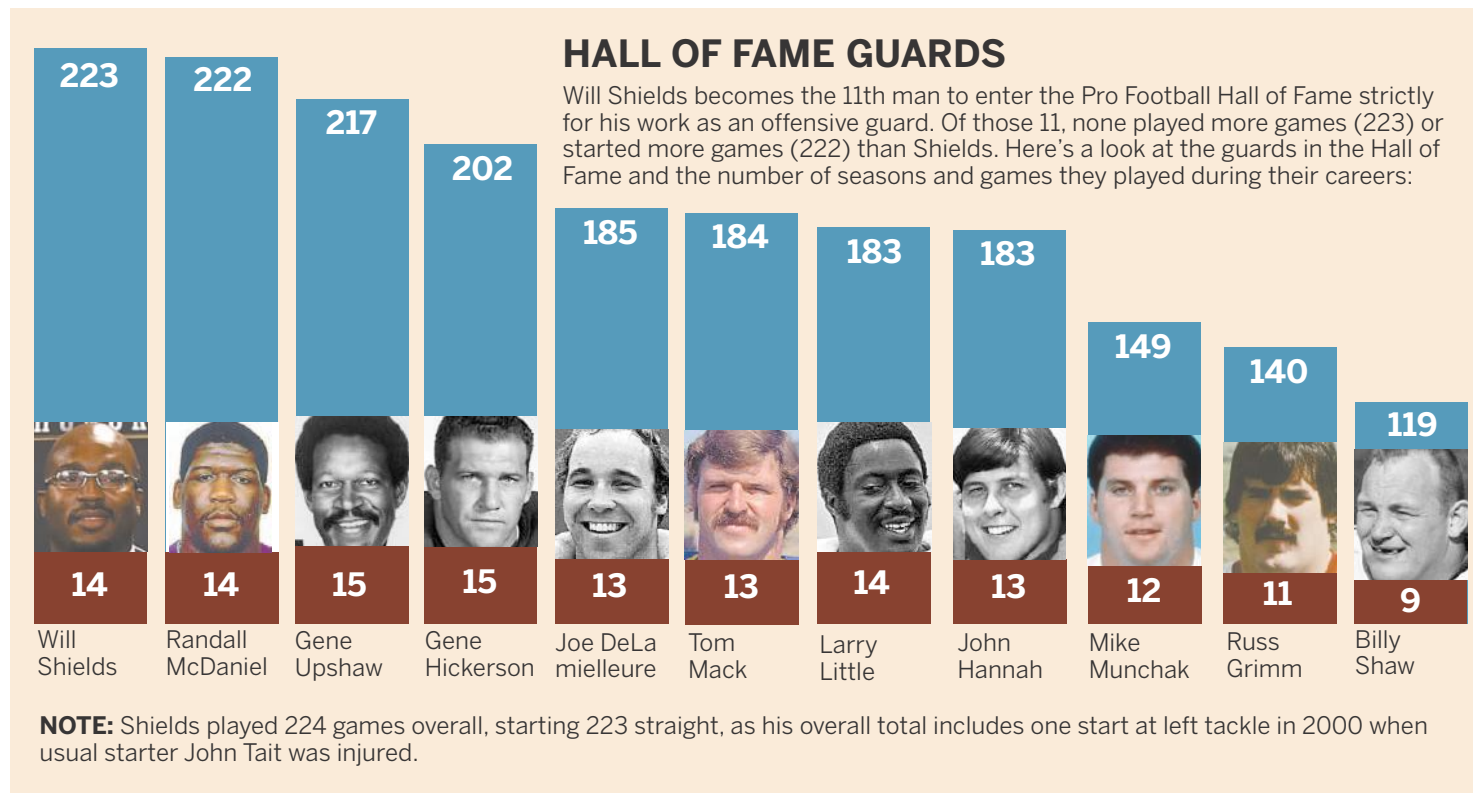
“There is no manufactured legend when it comes to him,” said his former Chiefs line coach Irv Eatman. “The legend is real.”

‘ALL-TIME FAVORITES’

Shields dominated. But he did so with quiet humility.

“Being an offensive lineman, you’re already hidden,” Shields said. “Nobody knows who you are. You never carry the ball, you don’t score touchdowns, you’re not on TV, flashing ‘Hey I’m this, I’m that.’”

Shields didn’t need to tell people what he was about. They saw how he went about his job on the field and his life off of it, and they knew.



“He’s one of the all-time favorites I’ve had in coaching,” NFL head coach Dick Vermeil said last month.

When Vermeil, who coached Shields for five seasons in Kansas City, says that it’s because he’s talking about more than football.

“If you ... combine the man and player,

he’s about as complete a package as you could put together,” Vermeil said. “He’s an outstanding human being, an outstanding football player, with outstanding integrity and outstanding self-discipline.”

The two remain in contact regularly. It is obvious Vermeil still holds Shields in high esteem.

He’s not alone.

“Putting my own ego aside, as a coach you don’t teach Will Shields you learn from Will Shields,” said Eatman, himself a former standout NFL lineman. “... Literally, you were learning from him. You’re

SEE **SHIELDS** 42

SHIELDS

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watching him and you know he's clearly one of the best and one of the best to ever play his position."

Shields' achievements back up Eatman's calling him one of the best ever.

Shields tied an NFL record by being selected to 12 Pro Bowls. No guard in the Hall of Fame has played in more games strictly at guard than Shields, who played in a Chiefs-record 224. He started the final 223 of his career, another team record, as he never missed a game during his career. He took pride in playing through injuries, with "body parts hanging off."

"It's each guy that you don't want to let down," he said. "It's about the sacrifices you make on the field for the greater good."

MAN OF THE YEAR

Shields paved the way for two 1,600-yard rushers and blocked for two 4,000-yard passers. With Shields and fellow Hall of Famer Willie Roaf as anchors of their line from 2001-05, the Chiefs led the NFL in total offense in that period, averaging 380.9 total yards per game.

He helped running backs Priest Holmes and Larry Johnson set records and reach Pro Bowls. Trent Green enjoyed three straight 4,000-yard passing seasons behind him. Tony Gonzalez became a household name at tight end.

Shields stayed in the background mostly.

Usually when the spotlight found him it was for his work off the field, where Shields excelled, too, as a philanthropist. He continues to make an impact on the lives of many in the Kansas City community. His off-the-field work earned him one of the league's highest honors — the 2003 Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year.

"There's no more deserving person of this than Will Shields for his on-the-field and off-the-field efforts," said former Chiefs President Carl Peterson, the man who drafted Shields in the third round in 1993.

"He's a man of few words,



■ Kansas City Chiefs guard Will Shields (68) leads Hall of Fame quarterback Warren Moon (2) into the end zone for the AFC during the 1998 Pro Bowl in Honolulu, Hawaii. Looking on is another Hall of Famer, Warren Sapp (99), of the NFC.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

but a man who obviously distinguished himself on the football field as a great player, but also as a great citizen."

It's not just his former coaches and executives that hold Shields in such high esteem.

"He was just dominant," said Green, the Chiefs quarterback from 2001 to 2006 and now an NFL analyst for CBS Sports. "You look at the 12 consecutive Pro Bowls, tied for the most ever. That just tells you the level of dominance he showed. And that's exactly what the Hall of Fame is for, guys who dominated."

Rich Gannon played quarterback from 1995-98 for the Chiefs. He knew he had a rock at right guard protecting him.

"I think all players appreciate excellence and that's what Will embodied," said Gannon, a former league MVP who also covers the NFL as an analyst for CBS Sports. "He was a dominant player at his position."

DISCIPLINE

A willingness to work. An eagerness to make an impact. Those traits drove Shields to success. They came to him at a young age in a military family.

"I'm what they consider an Army brat," Shields said. "I think that's where some of the discipline piece comes from."

Born Sept. 15, 1971, in Fort Riley, Kansas, Shields grew up in Oklahoma. His father did tours in Germany and spent some time in Korea.

"He sort of bit the bullet for us so that we could stay in the states and keep working on what we wanted to do," Shields said.

When his dad was not serving overseas, he made quite an early impact on his son.

"It's done a little different now than it was back in the day," Shields said. "Back in the day, dad was very stern. If you weren't up by 7:30, 8 o'clock you've wasted half the day, because he's used to being up at 6 in the morning and they've done PT, showered and been ready to go to work by the time you're just getting out of bed."

Once young Will got out of bed, he kept himself active. His introduction to football was in the family front yard with his older brother.

"We learned how to play the game without pads," he said.

Shields grew up watching the great Steelers teams of the late 1970s and early '80s. His favorite players were Jack Lambert and "Mean" Joe Greene. "I just liked the mentality of how they played," Shields said.

OKLAHOMA ROOTS

Shields began making a name for himself at Lawton High School in Lawton, Oklahoma. He was a three-year letterman at guard and defensive tackle. He remembers it as a competitive situation, which was good. And as his team became successful, his profile grew.

SEE SHIELDS 43

Chiefs knew they had something special in Shields

BY CHRIS BEAVEN

Repository Sports Editor

Finding Pro Football Hall of Famers in the third round of an NFL Draft is not an easy thing to do.

After decades of taking part in drafts, former Kansas City Chiefs President Carl Peterson knows that as well as anyone.

But Peterson also knew, pretty quickly in fact, that when his Chiefs drafted Will Shields in the third round of



PETERSON

He came from a great family. ... There wasn't any hesitation. It was one of the easier, quickest draft picks to make in my almost 30 years of football."

Shields had hopes of going in the second round to the Rams. He had a good workout for them ahead of the draft and thought they might take him. Shields took dropping to the third round in stride, but didn't completely forget it.

"I was a third-round pick. That put a little chip on my shoulder," he said. "I had to prove myself all over again."

With 12 Pro Bowl selections and a spot on the NFL's All-Decade Team of the 2000s, Shields proved plenty during his 14 seasons, all with the Chiefs.

Peterson had set his sights on Shields after scouting him several times during his career as an All-American guard at Nebraska.

"The one question about Nebraska offensive linemen (at the time) is you didn't get a chance to see them pass protect too much," Peterson said. "But if you saw him,

enough of his pulls and runs, and the athleticism he had, it just jumped out at you."

Peterson saw just one problem: How would the Chiefs be able to draft him? They had traded a first-round pick for quarterback Joe Montana that offseason and used a second-round pick the previous year in the supplemental draft on Darren Mickell. That left them with no picks in the first two rounds of the 1993 NFL Draft.

Shields being a guard in a run-dominated college program, though, worked to their favor.

"I was extremely surprised to see him in the third round for us," Peterson said. "I had to keep reminding him that he was our first-round pick. He shouldn't have been there in the third round."

As Shields dropped closer to them, Peterson told head coach Marty Schottenheimer and the rest of the men involved in the draft, "we don't need to debate this ... we're going to take Will Shields (if he's there)."

"I'd personally seen him play and talked with and discussed him with my very good friend (Nebraska head coach) Tom Osborne. We knew the character he had, and the football player he was with great football intelligence. There was just no holds, nothing negative on him."

That's not saying everyone in the Chiefs organization embraced the pick.

Peterson remembers that Alex Gibbs — "who is one of the great offensive line coaches" — was interviewed soon after the draft about getting a chance to work with Shields.

Peterson said Gibbs' response was, "I know the guy can run block, because he's from Nebraska. But I really question can he pass block, because he's from Nebraska."

SEE SPECIAL 43

SHIELDS

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“There was an article that came out, and they had a list of guys in this article, and they said these guys could play D-1 ball, and I just so happened to fall on that list,” Shields said. “And at that point, you weren’t really thinking about what happened next or anything of that nature.

“Then we went 14-0, we won state and from that point, after that season, we had the letters start coming in, it sort of changed the tide of what our talent was trying to accomplish and what we were doing.

“For a while there, we became a little football/baseball factory. I mean, we had at least 15 to 20 guys within our little three high schools that all were playing D-1 ball and then from there, we had like eight or nine guys go straight from there to play pros.”

Shields was selected the state’s lineman of the year by the Daily Oklahoman. His team won the Class 5A state championship. Its quarterback was Kelly Stinnett, who was a catcher with the Canton-Akron Indians before enjoying a 15-year career in Major League Baseball. Two other future NFL players, safety James Trapp and running back Dewell Brewer, also starred on that team.

“So within a three to four-year span, we went from having maybe one or two guys that get college scholarships to having quite a few all playing at different places, playing against each other and things like that,” Shields said. “... We were so worried about competing against each other that we never really knew how good we were until after you see all the scholarship things start coming to fruition.”

HUSKER STANDOUT

The scholarship opportunity Shields seized came from the University of Nebraska and legendary coach Tom Osborne. Shields arrived in Lincoln not dreaming of being an All-American or becoming an NFL player.

“It was more or less, how am I going to survive tomorrow just making sure I’m going to ... be able to play at that level,” he said. “And you’re walking

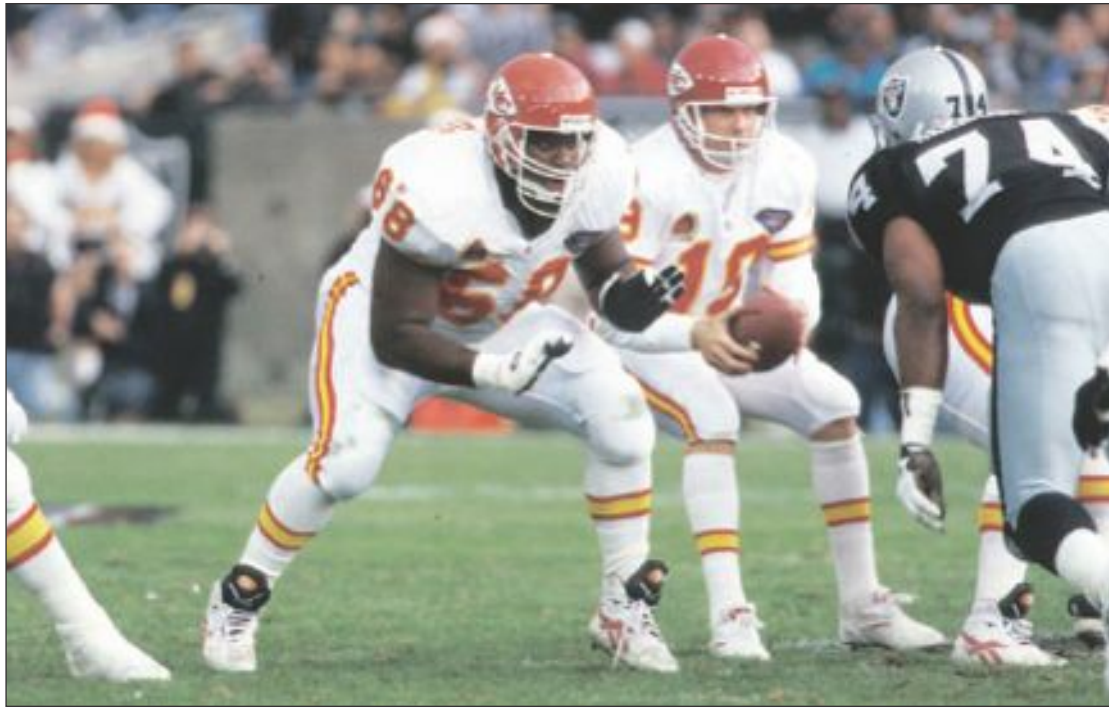


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME

■ Kansas City Chiefs guard Will Shields blocks for Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Montana in a 1994 game against the Los Angeles Raiders. Shields is joining Montana in the Hall of Fame.

around trying to figure out, ‘OK, I wonder what position this guy plays.’ You’re sizing people up. ‘I wonder what that guy plays.’ That kind of thing.”

Shields, though, made his mark with the Cornhuskers and earned All-Big 8 honors three times. He took his place among the program’s great offensive linemen, earning second-team All-America honors as a junior and first team All-America as a senior in 1992 when he also won the Outland Trophy.

Shields left a big impression on Peterson, who scouted him personally a couple times.

“The first thing that grabbed you was his athleticism,” Peterson said. “He was extremely gifted, light on his feet and could move in either direction. And he’d played against some of the top talent in college football.”

The Chiefs did not have a pick in the first two rounds. Peterson hoped Shields would last into the third round. He did and the Chiefs quickly drafted him. Shields arrived in a great situation on a veteran team.

“To have the guys that were there when I came in was a godsend,” Shields said. “I got a chance to have great linemen who had already built a mental tradition of what they wanted to be and then you bring in Joe Montana and Marcus Allen, and you had Kimble Anders,

and you had all of these guys that were veterans that work. They worked at their craft day to day.”

‘PH.D. ON THE FIELD’

Shields fit into their hard-working mold. Peterson quickly saw a guy who could excel, but offensive line coach Alex Gibbs did not want a rookie in the starting lineup protecting the aging Montana.

“In the first game, our right guard goes down,” Peterson said. “And Will was our backup at both guard spots. He’s got to insert Will, and, of course, Will starts the next 223 straight games. I’ve never let Alex Gibbs forget that. ... Will was just so talented.”

Talent alone, though, did not define Shields. He became known as a guy who did all he could to master his craft, plus share that knowledge with the rest of the team.

“Will was a tremendous student of the game,” Green said.

Eatman arrived in 2001 when Shields was well established as an elite guard. The coach soon found out why.

“The thing that always jumped out at me ... was his awareness, his game awareness,” Eatman said. “His physical ability was obvious. He could run, had great balance, a lot of control, could change directions and had great strength. But it was his game awareness that impressed me. He never

seemed to be caught in a bad situation or caught off guard.

“And once I was around him, I understood why. He was the best student of the game I was ever around, and that includes quarterbacks, running backs ... everyone. He was a Ph.D. on the field.”

Vermeil has become a regular at Hall of Fame enshrinements. The previous three years, he was in Canton to see three of his former players enshrined — Marshall Faulk, Roaf and Claude Humphrey.

Like Shields, each of the three was among the best at his position and worked extremely hard to reach Canton.

One thing stood out to Vermeil that is unique to Shields when he thinks of the Hall of Fame players he coached.

“Will didn’t say much,” Vermeil said. “You never really knew what was on his mind. But if you watched him closely, you knew what was on his mind. He was preparing to play and to play well.”

Quietly focused on excellence.

“To me,” Vermeil said, “there’s a lot of fine offensive guards already in the Hall of Fame, but there’s maybe none any better than Will.”

As Eatman said, the legend is real. ■

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SPECIAL

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Soon, Peterson “got a flaming call” from Osborne, who was not thrilled to see that comment.

“What in the heck is wrong with your offensive line coach?” Peterson said was Osborne’s message.

Peterson took it in stride, secure with his pick.

“That’s why coaches coach, scouts scout and administrators administrate,” Peterson said. “When you’re in the game, especially the professional game, you deal with egos and assistant coaches have egos. I obviously got after (Gibbs) pretty good and I told him your job is to make this guy a great pass protector.”

Still, Gibbs did not like starting rookies. He made that clear to both Shields and Peterson.

“It was quite obvious how good Will was, but Will was not going to start the season,” Peterson said.

Shields didn’t start the opener for the 1993 season — the only game in the NFL he would not start. An injury to left guard Dave Szott during the first game opened the door for Shields. Right guard Danny Villa moved to the left side and Shields took over at right guard, remaining there for 14 seasons. Szott eventually returned and started 92 games with Shields for the Chiefs.

With Montana at quarterback, the Chiefs reached the AFC title game in 1993, as Shields set a team record by starting 18 games counting the playoffs.

“There was a lot of pressure on our offensive lines to protect Joe for the two seasons we had him,” Peterson said. “We always called Joe the porcelain doll and no one touches that porcelain doll. And they worked very hard to prevent that.”

Shields settled in and soon was a leader up front.

“By his second, third year,” Peterson said, “it was so obvious how dominant he was.” ■

Also a standout off the field

Shields' accomplishments away from football also Hall of Fame worthy

BY CHRIS BEAVEN

Repository Sports Editor

His play on the football field impressed everyone who watched Will Shields.

Off the field?

That's where Shields really amazes people as a husband, father and philanthropist.

"You talk about charity, being active in the community, working with kids, adopting; he's always helping," said Dick Vermeil, the Chiefs' head coach from 2001-05. "I don't know anyone else that has done as much."

Through Shields' "Will to Succeed Foundation" — started in his rookie year in 1993 — he has touched the lives of more than 100,000 people. The foundation has done a number of programs over the years. It has helped children with emotional and behavioral disorders, met the needs of disadvantaged children, created an academic and personal improvement program for inner-city youth and benefited cen-



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ Will Shields, who was an All-American at Nebraska, speaks to students on the Girls and Boys Town campus in Omaha in 2004. Shields was the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year in 2003 for his charity work.

ters for abused and neglected children.

"I can't say enough good things about him, not just as player, but as a person, the kind of dad he is to his children, the family man he is

with his wife," former Chiefs quarterback Trent Green said. "This is who you want to emulate from a work ethic standpoint, this is how you want to handle your business."

Shields, along with wife Se-

nia, has been honored numerous times for his philanthropic work. He has served on a variety of non-profit boards in looking to make a difference.

"Once you've made a difference in one or two peoples' lives you see the growth," Shields said, "you see the change, you see the whatever that is, it becomes infectious and you love to see that over and over and over again, so that it helps you to repeat it. As they say, it becomes almost that natural high to be able to help somebody move forward or bridge people that at one point wouldn't know the other one existed for help."

Shields became active in volunteer work while he played for Tom Osborne at the University of Nebraska.

"Coach Osborne had us go out and do speaking engagements," Shields said. "... It sort of opened my eyes to where community-wise there's a bigger goal and you can help build bridges. That some people might not open those doors up unless you're there to sort of stick your foot in the door and go 'Hey, my name is such and such. I play for this, can you help us do this?'"

"And then you bridge it together with someone else. Coach Osborne sort of opened my eyes up to that with him building the Teammates Program and us being part of it and a mentoring program, and then from there he built the Unity Council, which also helped us lead our teams in different things and different ways. So just his way of thought helped create a different mindset for a lot of us as players."

Former Chiefs President Carl Peterson stressed community involvement in the organization throughout his long tenure in Kansas City.

"Every year, with every rookie contract we signed I put in there that they would make five gratis appearances each year for whatever number of years they signed for," Peterson said.

Over the years, some agents (and players) balked at that. Not Shields.

"Will jumped at it right way, didn't hesitate," Peterson said. "He got involved. His wife Senia got involved. Will came to our community relations director, Brenda Snizek, at the time and said, 'I want to start a foundation. How do I do that?'"

"When he made that commitment, which was very early on, you knew you had the right guy. It's so refreshing and great to have him do that. And he's still doing that."

Peterson said Shields set a tone within the Chiefs locker room.

"That type of leadership permeates the entire locker room with players," Peterson said. "Pretty soon, guys maybe go in a different direction. They look at Will Shields and say, 'Wow, this guy has got something going beside being a great player. How can I be like Will Shields?'"

The impact Shields made off the field during his career resulted in him being honored as the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year in 2003.

"I say it's one of those community things that I will treasure and it's an honor to be able to say I was part of it," Shields said.

He stresses an award like that is made possible by so many people.

"It's our community's award because without everyone else showing up to an event, paying for that shirt, putting in the time, none of this would be to fruition," he said. "At one point, I had a board of like 16, 17 people that would come in and help us put together golf tournaments, fundraisers. And we'd go with other teammates, Shadow Buddies, for kids that are ill. We'd do different things, reading programs, and without having your teammates to support you, and then the community's support around that, it's really nothing." ■

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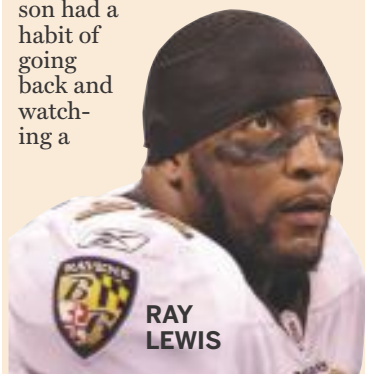
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Who hit me?

One game stands out in particular to former Chiefs President Carl Peterson when he looks back on the career of Will Shields. It was a Thursday night nationally televised game against the Baltimore Ravens, whose star middle linebacker Ray Lewis wore a mic during the game. Peterson had a habit of going back and watching a



replay of every Chiefs game, and he enjoyed this one.

"That game, (Chiefs running back) Priest Holmes had a huge game," Peterson said. "He's not going to have a huge game without our offensive line playing at a high level. ... It was just hilarious that Ray would go back to the bench and he'd be screaming at his other defensive guys, 'They're blocking me with two or three guys every single play, someone else has got to make a play.'"

"You look at it and pretty soon you'd realize it's Will Shields and Brian Waters, our guards, that are blocking him one-on-one. The guard is coming out and just knocking the dog out of him, and most of the time it's Will Shields. That's the guard because we were running to our right. The only guy blocking him is Will Shields."

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Tough critic

Shields started his career with the Chiefs with renowned offensive line coach Alex Gibbs as his position coach. Shields nicknamed Gibbs the "Mad Yodeler."

"He'd yell and cuss at you to where it all sound-



GIBBS

ed like a yodel," Shields said. "He had a saying, 'Rookies get you fired.'"

Another favorite Gibbs saying that Shields laughed as he recalled:

"The day we find out you could play, find out that you're special, that's when we look for five more to replace you."

Father knows best

Make no mistake about it, growing up with a father serving in the Army definitely made a positive impact on Shields.

"People would say, 'Are you afraid of police, are you afraid of

this? I'm afraid of dad first.' That was your biggest concern of what would dad say if you did this and you did that, let alone thinking about ever trying to get in trouble with the law or anything of that nature."

CHRIS BEAVEN

Wide-open offense, higher level of play

Vermeil brought out the best in Shields

BY CHRIS BEAVEN

Repository Sports Editor

Even a Pro Bowl lineman in the midst of a Hall of Fame career can get better.

Will Shields came to realize that about midway through his 14-year run with the Kansas City Chiefs. It happened when Dick Vermeil arrived as the new head



VERMEIL

coach in 2001.

Shields, by this point, was a five-time Pro Bowl pick. He'd earned All-Pro honors for the first time two years ago. He'd established himself as a hard-working team leader who knew he was good.

He was about to get better.

"I knew he was great player ... but I didn't realize how much talent he had and hadn't been exploited yet," Vermeil said earlier this summer. "Our offense was wide open, it was sideline to sideline

with screens, quick screens, guards pulling. So when you took his speed and mobility and combined it with his power, you were unlimited in what you could do with your offense."

Shields said it took some time to adjust to Vermeil and his philosophy. Shields remembers his new coach telling him, "I wasn't as good as I could be." Shields didn't care for that. He also was a free agent and realized Vermeil had other priorities to worry about besides his right guard. Looking back now, Shields described himself as "mentally arrogant."

It didn't take Shields too long in 2001 to realize his coach knew what he was talking about.

"It actually did make me a better player," Shields said.

The Chiefs from 2001-05, featuring Shields at right guard and Hall of Famer Willie Roaf at left tackle, led the NFL in total offense. They averaged 380.9 total yards per game over those five seasons.

Their quarterback, Trent Green, became a Pro Bowler and loved playing with Shields.

"We were kind of a mix offensively between pass and run," Green said. "If it was a game we had to dominate on the ground, we'd do that. You look back at that Atlanta game in 2002 where we had eight rushing touchdowns. He's a part of that obviously. You look at other games where I threw for 400 yards and we had to put it up in the air a lot, and nobody touched me."

All of that offensive success eventually translated into wins, too. In Vermeil's third season, 2003, the Chiefs went 13-3 and won the AFC West. It was their first post-season trip in six years, and the last of Shields' career.

"What really helped is he actually challenged me to do certain things so he was challenging me to utilize different skill sets that I hadn't developed as well," Shields said. "When you get to a certain point you can get away with certain things and it works for you, you sort of can't see some of the other things that some other coaches can see. And so he was one of those guys who picked little things apart, 'Well, you need to do this a little more, you need to do that a little more.' ... That's going to challenge you."

"So when he first came in I think it was the simple fact that I was becoming a free agent, I wanted to stay and he was basically having to be the guy to come in brand-new and sit in front of me and go, 'Sorry, we've got a quarterback issue. We need to go fix that first before we move on. And just basically we don't pay guards like you want to be paid to play this game.'"

Soon, though, Shields and Vermeil were on the same page. They became close and remain so to this day. They've coached together in college all-star games three times. Their families remain active together in various charity events.

Looking back now on the start of their football relationship, Vermeil offers a different view on his approach to Shields.

"I don't think it was challenging him as much as it was giving him an opportunity to exploit all of his talents," Vermeil said. "When he was out on perimeter on a screen or quick screen ... or a guard pull, he was devastating."

"Our offense was very wide open. It gave him a better opportunity to showcase what else he had to give." ■

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Pride and preparation

You couldn't go at half speed in practice with a line anchored by greats

BY CHRIS BEAVEN

Repository Sports Editor

Going half-speed in practice was not a good idea with the Kansas City Chiefs throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s.

Not with Will Shields on the field, in the midst of a team-record streak of 223 straight starts. Not with the offensive lines he helped make a huge strength for the Chiefs during his 14 seasons in KC.

"Practices were like games to those guys," former Chiefs



ROAF

quarterback Rich Gannon said. "The intensity in practices, going against our defense, that's what made those guys great. They didn't want to

make a mistake in practice, be it physical or mental."

The Chiefs line Gannon played with from 1995-98 was anchored by Shields at right guard, left guard Dave Szott, center Tim Grunhard and left tackle John Alt.

For quarterback Trent Green from 2001-06 it was Shields up front with fellow Hall of Famer Willie Roaf at tackle, Brian Waters at the other guard and Casey Wiegmann at center.

"That was a great offensive line with Szott, Alt and Grunhard," Green said. "But I'm biased. I like my guys, Roaf, Waters, Wiegmann; we rotated the other tackle.

"They were a complete group. They were competitive in terms of their preparation and that was the good thing about being a quarterback.

"... It got to a point where you have signals, code words, and I don't even think they needed it. They'd been together so long in terms of the protections and different changes."

Shields arrived in KC already a hard worker. But he soon learned the type of dedication to become a star in the NFL from the veterans he played with his first few seasons, particularly Marcus Allen, who was wrapping up his own Hall of Fame career.

"With him," Shields said, "it wasn't 'I'm a vet, I've been here, I'm going to take my time, take my days off and do this and do that.'"

Allen went hard in practice and paid attention to details on the field and in the film room. Shields took that to heart.

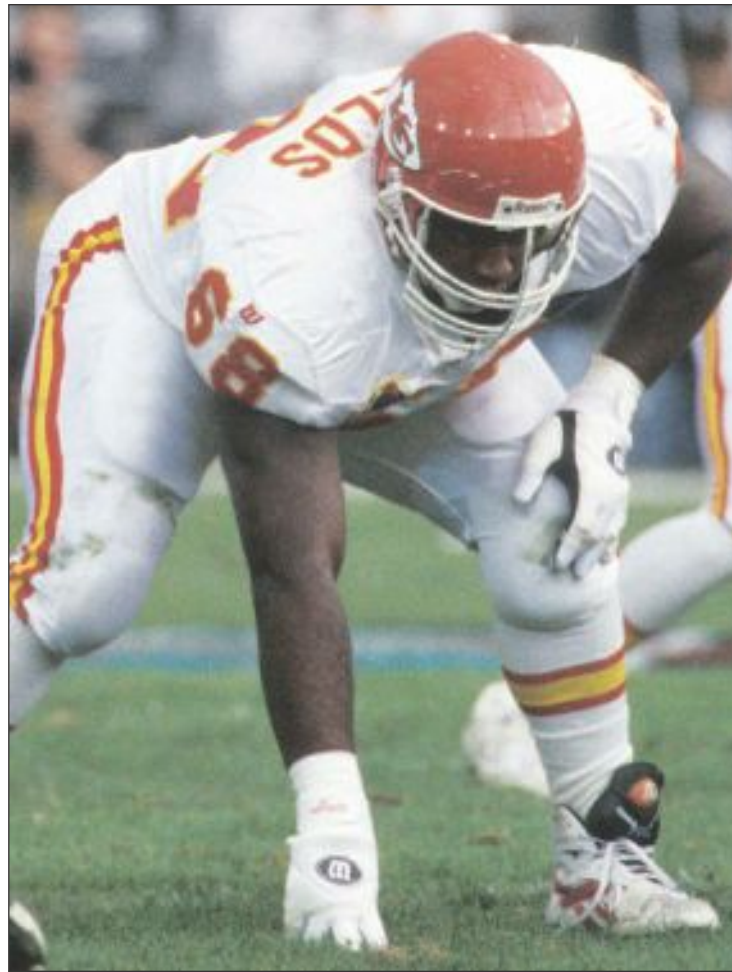
"You sort of start taking in, observing those little nuances of things they did," Shields said. "Marcus would sit in film and study film with you as a running back. ... He's back here asking, 'What can you do with this guy, let me know.' So he's already mentally went through and said, 'Oh you can do this with this guy, I'm going to make this cut off of this guy, set him so it's even easier for you.' But he's asking us, giving us input which made us even more part of the team."

Shields, a starter by his second NFL game, quickly fit in with his fellow linemen.

"I just remember that line of Szott, Grunhard, Alt and Shields, and that was the key to our success," Gannon said. "It was very rare in a season where he'd have a missed assignment or a mental error. It just didn't happen.

"When I think about the smartest guys I played with, I think of guys like Tim Brown, Marcus Allen and Will Shields.

"And the thing about the offensive line with Will, and Grunhard, and Szott, and Alt, they were all really highly intelligent players. These guys are really, really smart. These guys know how to play and also how to practice."



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ Led by Hall of Famer Will Shields, the Kansas City Chiefs offensive line worked just as hard in practice as it did in actual games.

They got after it in practice. They took great pride in their preparation and performance.

Over time, Shields gradually became that veteran for others.

"When you play that long, play that many consecutive games," Green said, "some of that stuff is going to sink in, and fortunately for us as a group, Will was able to retain all of that and share all that, and get us all on the same page. A big part of the success of the group as a whole was Will's knowledge and ability to convey that to everyone."

Practice was a time to work and work hard. And the goal, just like during a game, was to strive for perfection and win.

For Chiefs offensive line coach Irv Eatman, it was impressive to see.

"Watching him on a day-to-day basis, his professionalism always stood out," said Eat-

man, who coached the Chiefs from 2001-05. "He would never try to big-time anyone or say 'I'm Will Shields, I'm not going to practice today.' ... I think he was one of the most complete players I've ever been around at any position, not just offensive linemen or offensive guards, anyone.

"The emphasis he put as pro and how he carried himself would bring up the performance of the entire group."

Eatman remembers watching Shields getting the other linemen together on his own after practices. Shields was telling them they would be heading over to his house for more film study.

"We didn't have to tell him to do that ... he didn't do it for show," Eatman said. "And as a coach, you appreciate that because there's not enough hours in a day to get across what you need to get across." ■

Shields & Co.

Over the course of his 223 consecutive starts on the Kansas City Chiefs offensive line from 1993-2006, Will Shields started alongside 24 different offensive linemen. That group featured another Pro Football Hall of Famer (Willie Roaf) and four fellow Pro Bowl picks (Roaf, John Alt, Tim Grunhard and Brian Waters). The man who lined up with Shields the most was Grunhard, at center, as they started 125 games together. The most frequent combination he started with up front featured Grunhard at center, John Alt at left tackle, Dave Szott at left guard and Ricky Siglar at right tackle. They played 37 games together from 1993-96. Here's a complete list of the men who started up front with Shields during his streak of starts:

LEFT TACKLES

Willie Roaf	58
John Alt	55
Jeff Criswell	35
John Tait	34
Jordan Black	20
Glenn Parker	13
Derrick Graham	3
Marcus Spears	2
Kyle Turley	2

Note: Shields himself started one game at left tackle, on Dec. 10, 2000 against Carolina.

LEFT GUARDS

Dave Szott	92
Brian Waters	85
Jeff Blackshear	15
Glenn Parker	12
Jeff Smith	5
Marcus Spears	5
Donald Willis	4
Chris Bober	2
Danny Villa	2
Reggie McElroy	1

CENTERS

Tim Grunhard	125
Casey Wiegmann	95
Donald Willis	2
Brian Waters	1

RIGHT TACKLES

Victor Riley	52
Ricky Siglar	50
John Tait	32
John Welbourn	23
Glenn Parker	16
Marcus Spears	11
Derrick Graham	10
Jordan Black	9
Kevin Sampson	6
Kyle Turley	5
Chris Bober	4
Jeff Criswell	4
Trezelle Jenkins	1



CANTON'S CLASS OF 2015

Mick

TINGELHOFF

A blue-collar lineman from a rural Nebraska town took his proverbial lunch pail to work in the arctic air of Minnesota. He anchored the Vikings' offensive line for nearly two decades.

STORIES BY JIM THOMAS

Phone: 330-580-8336 Email: jim.thomas@cantonrep.com On Twitter: @jthomasREP

Despite his rugged good looks, you never would have found him running the beach in a fire-red bathing suit, biceps bulging before diving into the azure Pacific Ocean waters — all while surrounded by bathing-suit beauties hanging on his every word.

David Hasselhoff, yes. Mick Tingelhoff? Not a chance.

For one, there was no surf in Nebraska when Tingelhoff was a developing young football player in the 1950s and '60s. Certainly not after playing for the Cornhuskers when he trudged off to frigid Minnesota to anchor the Vikings' offensive line for 17 years.

Make no mistake, Tingelhoff was the original "Hoff" long before Hasselhoff starred on television.

Tingelhoff didn't need a sexy image or a talking car to make a name for himself. His style was 100 percent blue collar. The powerfully built 6-foot-2, 237-pounder brought the lunch pail to work and, yeah, bologna sandwiches were just fine with him.

So rock-solid reliable was Tingelhoff that for 240 consecutive games, No. 53 punched the clock as the starting center every regular season game of his professional football career. After 16 seasons of 14 games, plus playoffs, he then went out and started all 16 games the first year the NFL extended its season in 1978. When he retired, his streak was second only to teammate Jim Marshall's 270 games and is still third four decades later.



Hall of Famers, front and center

Mick Tingelhoff is just the seventh Hall of Fame center whom the bulk of their career 'centered' on that position and played since 1965, meaning over the last 50 years. The fortunate seven, their main team and playing careers:

Dermontti Dawson, Pittsburgh	1988-2000
Jim Langer, Miami	1970-81
Jim Otto, Oakland	1960-74
Jim Ringo, Green Bay	1953-1967
Dwight Stephenson, Miami	1980-87
Mick Tingelhoff, Minnesota	1962-1978
Mike Webster, Pittsburgh	1974-1990

"If you were to try to create a perfect player, for his position, he would be the model," said Bud Grant, Minnesota's Hall of Fame head coach for most of Tingelhoff's career. "In my definition of great players, durability ranks right up there at the top. To achieve greatness, you should have durability."

Durability and reliability were only a part of Tingelhoff's game. He was a terrific run blocker and a skilled pass protector who also handled Minnesota's long-snapping duties his entire career. Most importantly, Tingelhoff was a leader and a winner who captained a Vikings team that reached the Super Bowl four times and won nine division titles in a 10-year stretch.

He was still a center, however. He never was, or wanted to be, the center of attention. That partially explains why it took Henry Michael Tingelhoff 37 years to be selected for enshrinement into the Pro

Football Hall of Fame as a member of the Class of 2015.

"That was great," Tingelhoff said by phone in late June. "It is a big deal. But no, I didn't think I'd make it."

"I played a long time and I didn't get hurt. That was the main thing to me."

ACCOUNTABILITY LEARNED

When you are born into a small farming community such as Plum Creek, Nebraska in 1940, it is taken for granted that you pitch in and work when you are able. A young Tingelhoff worked the fields, milked the cows, baled hay.

"I rode my first head of cattle when I was in the eighth grade," Tingelhoff told Minnesota Vikings Magazine back in 1966, when he was a fourth-year NFL starter.

Sports? Tingelhoff's one-room rural schoolhouse with one teacher for 18 didn't even have them, so busy working the farm

were the parents and children back in the 1950s. When Tingelhoff got to high school, Lexington (Plum Creek had grown) had football.

"When I went to high school this big guy grabbed me and said, 'You're going out for football.' It was Merle Applebee," Tingelhoff said. "That was in the ninth grade."

An undersized fullback, Tingelhoff's freshman team lost every game. Moved to center and linebacker by Applebee, Lexington went undefeated his senior season and claimed the Class A state championship, but his father was too busy to come watch him most games.

That taught Tingelhoff that nothing was bigger than doing your job every day. It was either come work the farm, get a job or go to college.

"I went to college at the University of Nebraska," Tingelhoff said. "They played me at center and linebacker for four years."

In his offseasons, Tingelhoff variously worked as a gravedigger for the Nebraska archaeology department, a roughneck for an oil company and a policeman in Lexington. Work was in his blood.

His Cornhuskers teams were more husk than kernel. They never finished higher than sixth in the Big 7 or won more than four games. Tingelhoff played center and linebacker and lettered three times but didn't make all-conference, much less All-America.

SEE TINGELHOFF 50



TINGELHOFF

CONTINUED FROM 48

Tingelhoff then went undrafted by both the National Football League and American Football League. That left him with the option of using his degree in education, going back to the farm or trying free agency.

"After that, I went off to Minnesota," Tingelhoff said, taking up the Vikings' offer as a free agent.

"You might say we were farm guys. I came off a farm, Mick came off a farm," said running back Dave Osborn, Tingelhoff's teammate at Minnesota and longtime friend and neighbor. "The money wasn't big back in those days, but football was a lot better (profession) than education back then."

BUILDING BLOCK

Tingelhoff walked into a strange situation with the Vikings. They were a second-year franchise when he came into camp in 1962. Their head coach was Norm Van Brocklin, who had been a Hall of Fame quarterback.

"Old Stormin' Norman," Tingelhoff said with a laugh. "He (knew) a few bad words. He cursed a lot, in front of us. We had to (band) together."

"It was pretty rough. It was a tough camp, and it lasted a long time. I played both ways, center and linebacker. Then I gave up the linebacker. Van Brocklin's choice."

It proved to be the best choice Van Brocklin made. Tingelhoff studied tape of Green Bay All-Pro and eventual Hall of Fame center Jim Ringo. By his third season he made All-Pro and the Pro Bowl, using his linebacking attitude to bury defenders.

That was the first of seven straight such seasons, as Tingelhoff upheld Van Brocklin's proclamation a year earlier that "He'll be the next Jim Ringo of the NFL and play for 10 years."

While Tingelhoff's play soared, the team's did not. Van Brocklin had one winner in five years. After making All-Pro in '64 Tingelhoff was asked if doing it again was most important.

His answer was no, playing for a winner was. Enter Bud



■ Minnesota Vikings center Mick Tingelhoff looks for somebody to block during a game in 1970. Tingelhoff was selected by the Senior Committee to join the Pro Football Hall of Fame Class of 2015. Tingelhoff started all 240 games he played in the NFL. That is the second-longest streak in league history.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MINNEAPOLIS STAR-TRIBUNE

Grant in 1967.

"When you take over as coach, you ask, who are your leaders going to be?" the 88-year-old Grant said in June from his fishing cabin. "We had two captains: Mick Tingelhoff and Jim Marshall. We didn't have captains of the week or whatever. The two men I thought our team looked up to were Mick and Jim."

After going 3-8 in Grant's first year, Tingelhoff didn't have a losing season the rest of his career. Minnesota won its division nine of 10 years from 1968-1977. Tingelhoff hiked it to Joe Kapp for two years, Gary Cuzzo for two and Hall of Famer Fran Tarkenton the final six in that epic run.

Hall of Famer Ron Yary said Tingelhoff was key to that success.

"Your center, in my opinion, is the most important position on the line," said Yary, a Vikings offensive tackle of 14 seasons. "If you have a great center, it makes every other line position a lot easier. There are a lot of average centers who need assistance from the guards. You have to protect the center (position) first — it's the closest path to the quarterback.

Plus, they're responsible for making the calls on the line."

"Snapping the ball for 17 years, and never messing it up, well, that was Mick."

SUPER LETDOWN

Climbing the mountain that is the NFL proved bittersweet for the Vikings and Tingelhoff. They lost four Super Bowls to four different AFC teams, including back-to-back losses and three in four years.

Much of the blame fell on the conservative Minnesota offense. The Vikings scored 7, 7, 6 and 14 points in losses to Kansas City, Miami, Pittsburgh and Oakland, respectively.

In Tingelhoff's 17 seasons the Vikings had one 1,000-yard receiver (John Gilliam, '72) and one 1,000-yard rusher (Chuck Foreman, '75-'77). The offense was much like Tingelhoff, steady, ready and able, but far from flashy.

"Bud wanted us to control the ball," Osborn said. "Bill Brown and I, we could grind it out. Keep drives going. Keep the defense off the field."

"We won a lot of games 10-3, 7-6, because we could control the ball. If it was third-and-7, we'd probably still run the ball.

Bud Grant wanted a team that didn't make mistakes. Maybe we could've scored more."

The defeats didn't shake Tingelhoff, who said simply, "That's the game of football."

And really, all Tingelhoff wanted to do was play the game to the best of his abilities. Sure, winning was nice, a bonus for a job well done. In the end, though, it was about being a valuable part of a team effort.

"He was a nose-to-the-grindstone type," said former teammate and Hall of Fame defensive tackle Alan Page. "He was just about the team — you've got to love that. He was very much about the team."

Tingelhoff has always been about team, and community. That didn't change during his career, or after. He has been with his wife, Phyllis, for 55 years. They raised three children (Terri Ann, Michael, Pat) in Minnesota and have a dozen grandchildren.

Phyllis said her husband is still pretty much the guy she met back in Nebraska despite some residual football damage.

"We met in college, in class," she said. "We got married in college. I've been by his side

the whole time. He's just a very humble person.

"We live out in the suburbs. There are quite a few (ex-Vikings) out here now. His teammates and friends have just been so great (about the Hall of Fame selection). Wally Hilgenberg, Paul Krause, Ozzy (Dave Osborn). We're still close friends.

"A lot of our family is going to be at the Hall of Fame. It's going to be a huge reunion for the kids and grandkids, and they're all coming.

"It's going to be amazing," Phyllis added. "All the people that will be at Canton, I can't imagine it."

Grant said being selected to the Hall couldn't have happened to a better guy than Mick Tingelhoff.

"Mick was the nicest, toughest, best, meanest guy you could ever meet," Grant said of his fellow hunter and fisherman. "I never heard anyone say a bad word about him. He was intelligent, but not a talker.

"He just liked to play football." ■

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17 years, 240 straight starts

Undersized at 237 pounds, Tingelhoff used quickness to his advantage

BY JIM THOMAS

Repository sports writer

One look at Mick Tingelhoff said there was no way he would be a durable center in the National Football League. Even back in the league's Pleistocene period, in the early 1960s, he was a bison battling the woolly mammoths.

Somehow the 6-foot-2, 237-pound Minnesota center thrived in the cold and snow at old Metropolitan Stadium.

"He was just a tough guy," Vikings three-time 1,000-yard rusher Chuck Foreman said. "He was already in the league 12 years when I got to Minnesota. He was still playing at a high level.

"He gave you everything he could give."

Tingelhoff gave his all every play. Every game. Every season. The hard-bitten Nebraskan not only snapped the rock, he was Minnesota's rock for 17 seasons and 240 consecutive starts.

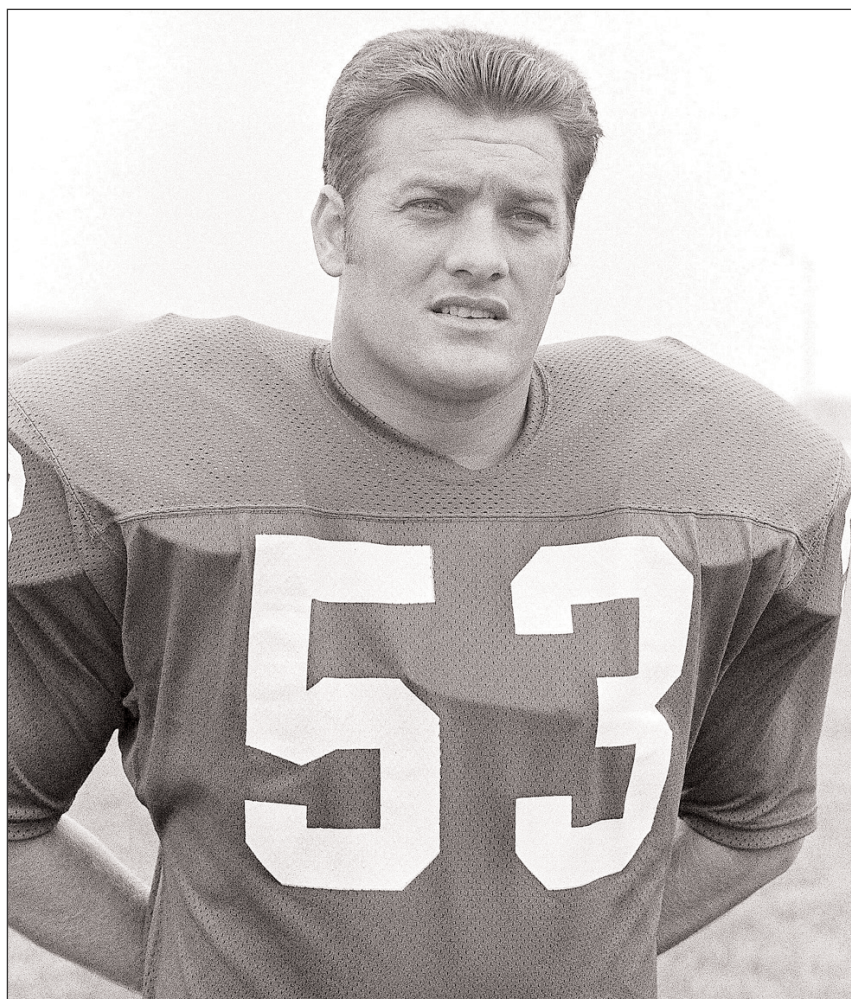
"Mick was just a guy that came to work every day with his bib overalls on, you could say," said Vikings running back Dave Osborn, who was Tingelhoff's teammate for 11 seasons. "Mick wasn't that big ... but he could block left, right, trap and pull."

Quick thinking, quick feet, those were the main weapons of choice Tingelhoff employed against the likes of bulky tackles and blitzing middle linebackers.

"In my opinion, the No. 1 asset for the center is to be quick," Tingelhoff said. "Centers, we've got to try and block people. Go after the middle linebackers, and tackles on both sides of the line. Call the defenses.

"The toughest middle linebacker to block? There were a lot. Dick Butkus. Ray Nitschke. (Tommy) Nobis."

The biggest and best tackles were the likes of Kansas City's Buck Buchanan, a 6-7, 275-pound behemoth of those days. It took talent to



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

disengage with size like that and to play every Sunday like Tingelhoff did, said Hall of Fame defensive tackle Alan Page.

"He did it for two reasons," Page said. "One, he was tough. Two, he knew what he was doing. He knew how to handle himself.

"The game is about leverage and positioning. He knew how to get in your way and keep you from getting penetration."

In those days, the defense had the edge, Vikings running back Chuck Foreman reminded everyone.

"Do you remember the head slap?" Foreman asked. "Those defensive guys used to wrap their hands up and use them as clubs. The offensive linemen had to block with their hands to their chest.

"They were open to more punishment, the defense pretty much had the advantage."

Tingelhoff knew how the defense operated. So he attacked first, said coach Bud Grant.

"He was an undrafted linebacker," Grant recalled. "That was his mentality, linebacker. Through necessity

or astuteness, the Vikings put him at center."

Physical and mental toughness kept Tingelhoff coming back week after week. He forgot the minor injuries and fought off the major ones, too.

Minneapolis Star-Tribune writer Sid Hartman wrote a story that detailed Tingelhoff playing with a torn muscle in his knee. Packers Hall of Fame coach Vince Lombardi told Hartman it was one of the best games he saw a center play, not knowing about the injury, and laughed when told.

Hartman went to the Vikings' doctor and had him send the X-ray to the disbelieving Lombardi.

"In a game, at that position, it's important that you are very stoic," said teammate and Vikings Hall of Fame offensive lineman Ron Yary. "You can't let people know what is bothering you."

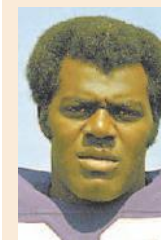
For 17 seasons, nothing and nobody bothered Mick Tingelhoff enough to keep from snapping the football. ■

Making a case for best center ever to play

There is a Pro Football Hall of Fame Senior Committee for a reason. Its job: Enshrine deserving players from bygone eras who were overlooked, unlucky or both.

The Senior Committee helped finally right what so many thought was wrong: Mick Tingelhoff's absence from the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Tingelhoff had been bypassed a long time, which is difficult to do, because some feel the Minnesota Vikings great has a legitimate case as the best to have snapped the ball back to quarterbacks since at least 1960.

"After all these years, he's finally getting the recognition he deserves," said Vikings Hall of



PAGE

Famer Alan Page. "Absolutely he should be in. He, certainly at the time I was playing, was one of the best centers in the game. I think he was as good a center as any center who played after that.

"You have to be good and you have to be healthy, not just every game but every week and every year," Page added. "He was both."

Page, a Canton native, knows greatness.

Tingelhoff started all 240 regular season games in his career. Along his way to the second-longest streak by any NFL player, he surpassed Hall of Fame center Jim Ringo's NFL mark of 182 straight games — by almost 33 percent.

Tingelhoff started in 141 Vikings victories in that streak. No other center was within 10 wins, including Hall of Famers Mike Webster and Jim Otto. Webster was the only Hall of Famer who played as many seasons as Tingelhoff's 17 years and his best starting streak was 150 games.

The rest of the best of the past 50 years — Otto, Ringo, Dwight Stephenson, Jim Langer and Dermontti Dawson — didn't play more than 15 seasons, with Stephenson lasting just eight. Langer played 12 seasons in Miami, started 141 straight and played in four Pro Bowls, all well below Tingelhoff's 17-240-7 line.

The only Hall of Fame center since 1960 who could approach what Tingelhoff did was Otto. Oakland's No. 00 started 210 straight and was the All-AFL center each of its 10 seasons.

No Hall of Fame center played in the Super Bowl more times than Tingelhoff's four appearances.

Tingelhoff being denied entry into the Hall of Fame until now, Hall of Famer and former Vikings head coach Bud Grant said recently, "is unfortunate."

Another Vikings Hall of Fame teammate, Ron Yary, felt strongly that Tingelhoff had been wronged.

"I think it's a complete injustice," he said. "The AFL-NFL back in that era had such a contentious relationship. I think it affected him (regarding the Hall of Fame)."

Thank goodness the Senior Committee finally saw the light, said Phyllis Tingelhoff.

"He wasn't really disappointed (previously)," she said. "He was always, 'Maybe next time.' It has taken a long time. He said 'if it's meant to be, it will be.'"

"When you look at his statistics and everything, they line up with all the centers in the Hall of Fame. He definitely had a wonderful career."

Maybe even the best of all the centers who've played the game in the last 65 years.

Minnesota's Mr. Nice guy

Subdued, humble describe Vikings' Tingelhoff

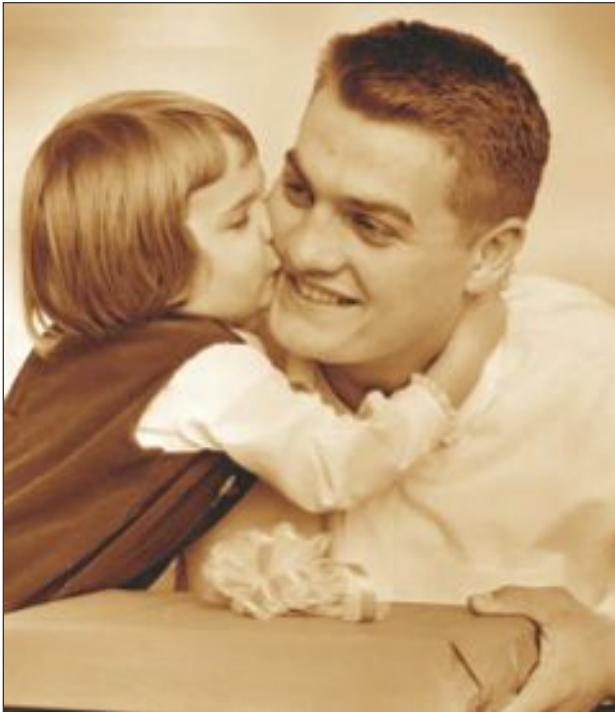


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MINNEAPOLIS STAR-TRIBUNE

■ Vikings center Mick Tingelhoff gets a kiss and a Christmas gift from his 3-year-old daughter, Teri, after he was named All-Pro in 1964.

BY JIM THOMAS

Repository sports writer

Dragging words out of the mouth of Mick Tingelhoff has always been a chore.

Born in rural Nebraska in 1940, raised on a farm, put to work at a young age and eons before social media existed, he didn't have many opportunities for eloquence growing up. Playing center, even a Pro Football Hall of Fame center, didn't make for many interviews in the 1960s and '70s either.

"I'm not much of an outgoing person," he told Hall of Fame voter Jerry Magee of the San Diego Tribune in a 1971 interview. "I prefer to be alone or to be with my family rather than promoting something."

"If I haven't achieved a great deal of notoriety, maybe I like it this way."

His former Minnesota team-

mates had no problem talking up the man they called 'Country' prior to his enshrinement as a member of the Class of 2015.

"He was very subdued," said fellow Vikings offensive lineman and Hall of Famer Ron Yary.

"Humble. There wasn't a flamboyant emotion in him. He gave what he gave and got what he got. He was Mr. Consistent.

"He was Equanimous — he could get excited but came down at the same speed."

Former Vikings head coach and Hall of Famer Bud Grant has spent nearly 50 years around Tingelhoff.

"I was very close to him," Grant said recently. "I was only 39 when I became coach. I was close in age to many of the players. We did a lot together. Hunted with Mick in Nebraska, fished together. We enjoyed each other's company."

"More than a football player, he

became a very good friend. He wasn't a socialite, he didn't drink.

"He's as nice a person as you'll ever meet. A credit to his family, team, Minnesota, anything he ever had contact with."

Vikings running back Dave Osborn said Tingelhoff was the type of player who suited up, shut up and went to battle.

"There was nothing fancy about Mick," Osborn said of his good friend. "He was the same guy 15, 17 years after he started playing. He went out there and played, and he did his best every game."

"You could hold your head high when you were done. But if you played on the offensive line, most people didn't know your name. Receivers, running backs, quarterbacks, they were the ones in the limelight."

Just the way Tingelhoff liked it.



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From out of nowhere, to the Hall of Fame

Tingelhoff was passed over in NFL, AFL drafts

BY JIM THOMAS

Repository sports writer

The National Football League conducts a draft of players unlike any other professional sport. The first day is exclusively for the first-round elite, held in prime time on ESPN. Then follows a second day, and a third, with the last player selected gaining notoriety as 'Mr. Irrelevant.'

New Pro Football Hall of Famer Mick Tingelhoff couldn't even attain Mr. Irrelevant status. The three-year letterman from Nebraska went undrafted in 1962 by not only the NFL, but the fledgling American Football League as well.

And that was when the two leagues' personnel were in a fight to the death, with drafts covering 20 rounds.

"I think the scouting today has become more sophisticated and is much improved over what it was then," Tingelhoff said in a 1969 interview with the Duluth Herald. "There isn't much chance of a major college player being overlooked."

Certainly not these days. That's why Tingelhoff will be just the 16th undrafted member of the Hall of Fame. Most of those were from the 1940s, when the draft was in its infancy. Minnesota's Randall McDaniel (1990) is the only undrafted player of the last 25 years to make the Hall of Fame.

Tingelhoff said that he had been scouted by both the



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HALL OF FAME

■ Minnesota Vikings center Mick Tingelhoff went overlooked out of Nebraska as he wasn't drafted in 1962. He went on to play 240 straight games in the NFL.

Vikings and the St. Louis Rams.

"You can imagine my surprise the day after the draft when I picked up the newspaper and my name wasn't mentioned anywhere," Tingelhoff said to the Duluth Herald.

Ever the optimist, Tingelhoff turned the negative into a posi-

seasons into his career. "Van Brocklin had been watching me and he needed a center pretty badly. He found out no one was going to draft a center, so he used draft choices on (others) and called me when the draft was over.

"It was more like being drafted than being a free agent."

Tingelhoff was more agitated at the time with the Nebraska Cornhuskers than the AFL and NFL for their neglect. Nebraska head coach Bill Jennings made the strange choice before Tingelhoff's senior year to make him a two-tackle after three pretty successful seasons at center and linebacker.

The Cornhuskers won four games that year. Tingelhoff did not make All-Big 8 in the league's first year and none of the seniors on the team were drafted.

"We were mostly inconspicuous," he said.

Playing center, Tingelhoff was used to being inconspicuous. But that changed after being signed by Minnesota for the princely sum of \$10,000. He became the starter his second preseason game and held it for 17 seasons.

When Tingelhoff accepted the 1,000-Yard Club's award in 1969 as the NFL's most outstanding blocker, he began his speech with this:

"Somehow, I think I can accept this award in honor of all the free agents in the league." ■

Undrafted Hall of Famers

Mick Tingelhoff is the 16th undrafted player — and third center — to reach the Pro Football Hall of Fame.



Frank Gatski, 1946, Cleveland (AAFC), center



Lou Groza, 1946, Cleveland (AAFC), tackle/kicker



Marion Motley, 1946, Cleveland (AAFC), fullback



Bill Willis, 1946, Cleveland (AAFC), middle guard



Joe Perry, 1948, San Francisco (AAFC), fullback



Emlen Tunnell, 1948, New York Giants, safety



Jack Butler, 1951, Pittsburgh, cornerback



Dick "Night Train" Lane, 1952, L.A. Rams, defensive back



Willie Wood, 1960, Green Bay, safety



Mick Tingelhoff, 1962, Minnesota, center



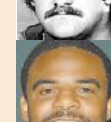
Willie Brown, 1963, Houston, cornerback



Emmitt Thomas, 1966, Kansas City, cornerback



Larry Little, 1967, Miami, guard



Jim Langer, 1970, Miami, center



Warren Moon, 1984, Houston, quarterback



John Randle, 1990, Minnesota, defensive tackle

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Ron WOLF

**CANTON'S
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The front-office man began his career by helping build Oakland to three titles. Then he cemented his legacy by sticking with a gunslinging QB from Mississippi — whose next stop is also Canton.

STORIES BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

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Ron Wolf was one of those trust-your-gut, bust-a-gut general managers who dug through the dirt and found true grit.

Ghosts of failed picks past didn't scare him.

The older he got, the more he believed his eyes. The surer he knew how Lady Luck was supposed to look, that the next dance would bring out the Mona Lisa smile.

All of this was in play when Wolf, past 50, started chasing Brett Favre.

He was the new Green Bay Packers general manager in 1991, in charge of everything short of the official team cheese. He felt like a new man, resolved to make the best of authority that was never going to exist during his marathon run with Al Davis.

If it happened to be in Green Bay, which had turned into West Siberia, and if he was captain of the Edmond Fitzgerald, oh, well.

SOLD ON FAVRE

Between working for Big Al's Raiders and the small-town Packers, Wolf squeezed in a fateful interlude with the New York Jets in parts of 1990 and '91. His Jets boss, general manager Dick Steinberg, died in 1995, but 20 years later is regarded by Wolf in reverential tones.

"I spent a year and a half with Dick," Wolf recalls, "and in that year and a half I learned there were other ways to do

Missing the boat

NFL career numbers of the first three quarterbacks picked in the 1991 draft. Ron Wolf rated Favre as the No. 1 player in that draft, but his team at the time (the Jets) was out of position to land him.

QB, Draft position, college/drafted by	Comp-Att	Yds	TDs	Ints	Record
Dan McGwire, No. 16, San Diego State/Seahawks	74-148	745	2	6	2-3
Todd Marinovich, No. 24, USC/Raiders	104-205	1,345	8	9	3-5
Brett Favre, No. 33, Southern Miss/Packers	6,300-10,169	71,838	508	336	186-112
Browning Nagle, No. 34, Louisville/Jets	213-437	2,489	8	20	4-10

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO



BRETT FAVRE

things. It was a tremendous education."

Wolf rapidly grew in influence on Raiders teams that won three Super Bowls, and he credits Davis for the education of a lifetime, but there was something to be said for escaping that Jurassic shadow.

When he did, Favre was playing to mixed reviews in Hattiesburg, home of the Southern Mississippi Golden Eagles. He scared as many scouts as he intrigued, with passing yardage dropping from 2,588 in 1989 to 1,572 in 1990.

The Jets went 6-10 in 1990 behind fading veteran quarterback Ken O'Brien. Favre had been misread before, getting no major-college offers other than the one from Southern Miss, and now he was seen as too risky for Round 1.

This was the case despite Favre's incredible win over Alabama, which he directed six weeks after nearly bleeding to death in a car accident that led to 30 inches of his small intestine being carved out.

"That game told you a lot about Brett Favre," Wolf says now.

Wolf supposed the car wreck took a toll on Favre's senior year after the Alabama adrenaline wore off. The old scout's "it" detector stayed on.

A film guy with an unforgettable name, Famous Coleman, told a group of scouts from several teams they needed to dig into Favre's junior year. Wolf dug in hard.

The film checked out the way Coleman said it would. Wolf all but ignored the 1990 stats and accounted for Favre's wins over Florida State in 1989 and over Alabama and Oklahoma (especially Oklahoma, where Wolf obtained a degree) in '90.

In his report, Wolf's bottom line that he almost literally felt the field tilting in Southern Miss's favor each time Favre took the field.

"In talking with Dick Steinberg after we had done a draft preparation," Wolf recalls, "I said, 'You know, the best player

in the draft is Brett Favre.' Dick agreed with that.

"We put Brett on our board as our No. 1 guy."

Wolf's son Eliot, now Green Bay's director of player personnel, recalls his father's conviction 24 years later.

"I was in third grade, and we were at the dinner table," Eliot said. "Dad had just come back from Hattiesburg, and he told us, 'Brett Favre is the guy.' For him to talk about his job like that at our table ... it didn't happen too often."

There was a problem. The Jets had forfeited their first-round pick by taking receiver Rob Moore in the supplemental draft. On draft day, Russell Maryland and Eric Turner went to the Cowboys and Browns with the first two picks. The first quarterback picked was Dan McGwire, by the Seahawks at No. 16. Al Davis pounced on Southern Cal QB Todd Marinovich at No. 24.

WOLF

CONTINUED FROM 57

The Jets' first pick was at No. 34. Selections 29, 30 and 31 became Ed King (Browns), Reggie Johnson (Broncos) and Roman Phifer (Rams). That left only the Cardinals and Falcons between the Jets and Wolf's man.

"Dick Steinberg tried to work a deal with the Cardinals," Wolf recalls, "but the Cardinals said, no, they wanted a guy who was still there (defensive end Mike Jones), and they wound up taking him."

Atlanta pounced on Favre at No. 33.

"Then it was our turn, and the head coach took another guy," Wolf says 24 years after that punch in the nose.

The Jets' coach was Bruce Coslet. His pick was quarterback Browning Nagle. Wolf had no clue how well this would turn out for him.

BIG DEAL

Late in the '91 season, Green Bay fired personnel chief Tom Braatz and, with Steinberg's blessing, hired Wolf, who was 52 years old.

The Packers were in a depression. Wolf joined them with four games left in a '91 season that ended at 4-12.

"The first game happened to be against Atlanta," Wolf said, smiling at the serendipity.

Favre's rookie year in Atlanta was going worse than Johnny Manziel's with the 2014 Browns. Falcons head coach Jerry Glanville had resisted drafting Favre and was content to bury him behind Chris Miller and Billy Joe Toliver. Favre got his first chance in Game 10, late in a 56-17 loss to Washington, and it did not go well — 0-for-4 with two interceptions and an 11-yard sack.

Favre was back at third-string for the Green Bay-Atlanta game. Wolf and Falcons GM Ken Herock had worked together with the Raiders, which helped along a pregame conversation in which Wolf told Herock he wanted Favre.

"Ken told me if I wanted to see Brett throw, I would have to look at him before the teams came out, because the

coaches wouldn't let him take part in the team stuff," Wolf recalls. "Right then and there I knew I had a shot. So I talked to (Packers president) Bob Harlan about it during the game and started working on it."

Glanville said in a 2010 radio interview with Nashville radio station WNSR:

"I had to get him out of Atlanta. I could not sober him up. I sent him to a city where at 9 o'clock at night the only thing that's open is Chili Joes. You can get it two ways, with or without onions.

"And that's what made Brett Favre ... going to a town that closed down. If I would have traded him to New York, nobody to this day would have known who Brett Favre ever was."

As Favre himself told Packers beat writer Tom Silverstein years later, "I'm sure I didn't help my cause by trying to drink up Atlanta."

Having intended to bring Favre to New York in 1991, Wolf redirected him to Green Bay on Feb. 10, 1992, trading the Packers' top draft pick at No. 19 overall. Oddly, the Falcons spent the pick on Favre's former Southern Miss teammate, running back Tony Smith, who never got in a game after 1994, at which point his career rushing total was 329 yards.

The deal haunted Herock, who grew up in Pittsburgh and remembered that his beloved Steelers once allowed Johnny Unitas to escape and become a Baltimore legend. It paved the way for Wolf's imminent enshrinement into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

HISTORY BUFF

Wolf grew up on the other end of Pennsylvania, in an old railroad town, New Freedom. It was 30 miles north of Baltimore and 30 miles east of Gettysburg. The region whet his appetite as a history buff. His parents — a plastics engineer and a homemaker — instilled traditional values.

After high school, Ron joined the Army and was stationed in Berlin. His hitch lasted "15 months and 28 days ... don't ask me why I remember that."

He then played small-college

Wolf and the late show

Examples of notable players drafted in late rounds by Ron Wolf.

■ **DB Doug Evans**, Round 6, 1993. Started at right cornerback for Super Bowl teams in 1996 and '97.

■ **RB Dorsey Levens**, Round 5, 1994. Ran for 1,435 yards in 1997 regular season, leading to Super Bowl.

■ **G Adam Timmerman**, Round 7, 1995. Started 172 games in the NFL; starter on Packers' '96 and '97 Super Bowl teams.

■ **G Marco Rivera**, Round 6, 1996. Started 141 games in a 10-year NFL career.

■ **QB Matt Hasselbeck**, Round 6, 1998. Traded him to old friend Mike Holmgren's Seattle team in 2001, led Seahawks to 2005 Super Bowl.

■ **WR Donald Driver**, Round 7, 1999. Played 13 years, delivering 10,137 receiving yards. Started for the Super Bowl winning team in 2010.

■ **DE Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila**, Round 5, 2000. Was in on 72 sacks for Packers from 2001-07.

■ **OT Mark Tauscher**, Round 7, 2000. Started 132 games.



DONALD DRIVER

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

baseball in Tennessee before transferring to the University of Oklahoma, where he didn't play sports but saved some money. His first sports love was pro football, and he was very young when he knew he wanted a career in it.

He was mesmerized by the first NFL game he saw live, Chicago at Washington in 1948, when he was 9. He became a big admirer of Paul Brown's Cleveland teams, which produced the quarterback he still thinks is the greatest in history, Otto Graham.

After college, he landed a job at Pro Football Illustrated, which led to an interview with Al Davis and a job with the Oakland Raiders of the American Football League (see related story).

For a while, Wolf and Jim Dawson were the Raiders' only scouts, and by 1965, Wolf, at age 27, was the 36-year-old Davis' right-hand man.

Wolf played a strong role in the drafting of Art Shell, Gene Upshaw, Ken Stabler and Jack

Tatum, players behind the Raiders' 37-5-1 record in their final three AFL seasons. After merging into the NFL, they won division titles in six of their first seven seasons, and Wolf had a reputation.

He spent two rough years (1975-76) as an architect of the expansion Tampa Bay Buccaneers before rejoining Davis for another decade.

When he got his break with the Packers, his first move was to fire head coach Lindy Infante and replace him with 49ers offensive coordinator Mike Holmgren.

Holmgren liked Favre, went 9-7 with him in the first year, stuck with him during a lull, and saw a payoff with consecutive trips to Super Bowls.

"My dad recognized that Mike Holmgren and Brett Favre were guys really, really good at their jobs, and they recognized that he was really good at his," Eliot Wolf said. "They gave each other room to grow. For three personalities that strong to have the kind of mutual respect they did was

pretty impressive."

KNOWS HIS QBS

Wolf retired from the Packers after the 2001 draft. His foundation, still featuring Favre, contributed to division crowns in 2001, '02, '03 and '04.

"Ron is the guy who put everything together," Favre said after Wolf was elected to the Hall of Fame. "He led our renaissance."

Adding free agent Reggie White got the Packers over the hump and into their first Super Bowl in 29 years in the 1996 season.

Donald Driver, Mark Tauscher and a substantial number of others (see related story) transcended their draft status.

Wolf's legacy is tied to quarterbacks, and not just Favre. He was involved with the 1967 trade that brought the Raiders Daryle Lamonica, who led a 40-7 wipeout of Houston in the 1967 AFC title game, followed by a loss to Green Bay in Super Bowl II.

He was behind the drafting of Ken Stabler, the Raiders' quarterback when they routed Minnesota in Super Bowl XI. He correctly guessed that Favre (186 career wins, 71,838 passing yards, 508 TD passes) could amount to something.

"Listen, I didn't bat a thousand," Wolf said. "I was part of the Lamonica deal. I hit Ken Stabler. Obviously Brett Favre was good. There were guys we missed, too.

"I do know the No. 1 tenet in the game is that you've got to have a quarterback."

In 1991, the Packers used Mike Tomczak, Don Majkowski and Blair Kiel as starting QBs. Attendance for the home finale at Lambeau Field dipped below 45,000.

Frank Deford wrote in Sports Illustrated that the franchise was doomed if it did not move all of its games to Milwaukee.

Ron Wolf had other moves in mind. He fired a coach, traded for a quarterback and dropped anchor.

Imagine anyone trying to get the ship out of Green Bay now. ■

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Blame game

Wolf believed Holmgren was 'primarily responsible' for Packers' Super Bowl loss in '08

BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

Repository sports writer

The Packers were ridiculous favorites, 11 points over Denver, heading into Super Bowl XXXII.

Losing 31-24 left a scar on Ron Wolf.

"We're a one-year wonder, just a fart in the wind," the Green Bay general manager said afterward according to Bob McGinn, a writer who covered the game.

The Jan. 25, 1998 defeat against Denver came a year after the Packers routed New England in Super Bowl XXXI. Wolf had smelled dynasty.

His demanding approach, his experience (he was 60) and his background with the brutally honest Al Davis help explain the blunt disappointment that was more than a one-liner.

When McGinn researched a 10-year anniversary look at the game in 2008, Wolf told him, "I'm probably still not over it."

McGinn said Wolf held Holmgren "primarily responsible" for the Super Bowl defeat, quoting the GM as saying:

"Certain calls were to be made that weren't made. Mike Holmgren refused those calls. There would have been an ad-

justment on the blocking scheme and it would have been over.

"You have to adjust. When you fail to adjust in critical situations, you're going to lose, and that's what happened here. To be pig-headed about it, I mean, to have the answer and then not apply it, that's a little different."

Wolf based his observations on conversations with coaches years after the Super Bowl loss.

"For somebody to bring it up and explain to you what could have been done and what should have been done, it rekindles the fire every once in a while," Wolf said.

At issue: Holmgren kept sending out five receivers in hopes Brett Favre would wear out Denver's secondary; too few blockers were kept in to protect the passer.

There were other factors. The Packers couldn't stop running back Terrell Davis. Hall of Fame defensive lineman Reggie White had an off day. Darius Holland, who later played for the Browns, was an injury replacement on the defensive line who got man-handled by Denver left tackle Gary Zimmerman.

And, as Wolf observed, "We were fat cats. Maybe they did want it more than we did."



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ Cleveland Browns President Mike Holmgren (right) watches a Browns training camp practice alongside Ron Wolf in Berea in 2011.

The Packers followed up the Super Bowl loss with an 11-5 year in 1998. After a wild-card loss to the 49ers, Holmgren spurned overtures from the reborn Browns and became head coach of the Seahawks.

Wolf stayed on as general manager of the Packers through the 2001 draft.

"Wolf has not talked to Holmgren about what he has learned (as to a failure to adjust) and says he never will," McGinn wrote in 2008. "Their relationship, though cordial, was never quite the same after Holmgren left for Seattle."

That was in 2008.

Midway through the 2009 season, Browns owner Randy

Lerner's disgust with the direction of his franchise came to a head with a loss at Chicago that dropped Cleveland's record to 1-7.

Lerner announced a search for a new "credible authority" to lead the franchise. Lerner fired general manager George Kokinis and sought out Wolf for direction.

Lerner later told The Repository this was Wolf's bottom line: "You have to get Mike Holmgren."

Based on Wolf's recommendation, Lerner named Holmgren president of the Browns on Jan. 5, 2010. ■

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Wolf got his guy in HOFer Tim Brown

Ron Wolf knew Al Davis could be a cantankerous cuss.

Heading into the 1988 NFL draft, their Raiders had the No. 6 overall pick, and boss Davis set his sights on Wisconsin left tackle Paul Gruber. The owner told his long-time right-hand man Wolf to get to Gruber any way he could.

When Wolf was unable to pull off a trade and Gruber was snapped up by Tampa Bay at No. 4 overall, Davis stormed out of the room.

"You guys take who you want," he said to Wolf and those remaining.

The Raiders picked Wolf's guy, Notre Dame wide receiver Tim Brown.

Recounting his rookie season years later, Brown said, "When they told Al they were taking me, he wasn't too happy about it. I had a lot on me my rookie year. Thankfully, I had a good year."

Brown went on to play 16 years for the Raiders, delivering 14,734 receiving yards and 99 touchdowns.

"Ron always pats me on the back when he sees me," Brown says now.

Quotebook

What they're saying about former Packers general manager Ron Wolf's induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

■ Mike Holmgren, whom Wolf hired as head coach in 1992 after firing Lindy Infante:

"I was a first-time head coach in the league. I was fortunate to be partnered with Ron, who was not only the best general manager in the business, but also very much a mentor to me in all things about the NFL.

"While we didn't agree on everything, we never had a harsh moment. Anything that he decided, as my boss with my help, was in the best interest of the Green Bay Packers. It was a privilege to work with him, and I consider him a good friend."

■ Bob Harlan, who was chairman of the Packers when Wolf was hired as general manager late in 1991:

"The turnaround Ron directed for us is probably as significant as any in the history of the NFL. Ron changed the culture for the Packers and turned it into a positive, winning environment.

"His hiring of Mike Holmgren, trading for Brett Favre and signing Reggie White were instrumental. We were winning again, with character and dignity. It was an amazing turnaround, and without Ron it would not have happened."

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ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

■ Green Bay Packers General Manager Ron Wolf (right) poses for a picture with new head coach Ray Rhodes in 1999. Rhodes was hired after the firing of former coach Mike Holmgren.

Wolf went from wannabe, to Al Davis' eyes and ears

BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

Repository sports writer

Ron Wolf was Mel Kiper with a lesser head of hair and a better pair of eyes.

He was a pro football wannabe full of fire and smarts but without a playing career past high school and with zero connections.

He was 23 when he talked his way into a job with Pro Football Illustrated. As a reader, he had written a couple of letters to managing editor Ted Albert, pointing out mistakes, which led to applying for a job.

Albert came to appreciate Wolf's precision and ability to remember names. One time when Albert was interviewing Oakland Raiders, Albert told Davis about Wolf, which led to a job as a scouting trainee.

Wolf wound up working for Davis off and on — mostly on — for the next 27 years.

Before he died, Davis told the Los Angeles Times, "Ron Wolf became my eyes and ears while I was coaching and later my co-worker and close friend. He's one of the guys who built this organization.

"He knows how to put the pieces together."

There was no danger of getting lost in a crowd in the American Football League. Davis' entourage included four assistant coaches and, at one point, Wolf and Jim Dawson as the entire personnel department, aside from Davis himself.

Everything he learned about pro football, Wolf said, was "directly attributable to what I learned working with Al Davis.

"Al was a big comparison guy. He'd take the left tackles in the American Football League and rank them one through eight.

"He would show you on film why a guy was really good or why a guy was really bad."

By 1965, Wolf was Davis' right-hand man in personnel. In 1968, the Raiders drafted quarterback Ken Stabler (No. 52 overall), tackle Art Shell (No. 80), defensive back George Atkinson (No. 190) and running back Marv Hubbard (No. 277). That kind of work reflected an era in which the Raiders had 16 straight winning seasons.

It got Wolf hired by the expansion Tampa Bay Buccaneers

in the mid-1970s as the chief roster builder.

The Bucs lost their first 26 games, and Wolf was fired after two years. Friends needled him about being "a genius."

"I was looking for a hole to climb into," Wolf said.

He returned to Oakland and watched Tampa Bay make the 1979 playoffs with 16 starters he had acquired. He was re-established with the Raiders in time for a 1980 season that included the famous "Red Right 88" playoff game at Cleveland.

He helped the Raiders build rosters that had six winning seasons and won two Super Bowls from 1978-85. He stayed with Davis several more years, surviving a heart attack early in 1990, then jumping to the Jets later in the year. His epic run in Green Bay began in 1991.

He joins Davis in the Hall of Fame.

"In essence, Al Davis trained me," Wolf said. "I learned and learned and learned. I guess it worked." ■

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Younger Wolf following in his father's footsteps

BY STEVE DOERSCHUK

Repository sports writer

A Wolf is at the door of the Green Bay Packers' big roster moves.

Shortly after his father, Ron, was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Class of 2015 for

his work as a Green Bay architect, Eliot Wolf was named Packers director of player personnel.



E. WOLF

Ron Wolf, general manager of the Packers from 1992-2001, is thrilled to see his 33-year-old son rising through the ranks.

"It's a great credit to Eliot, and a credit to his mother, since she raised him," said Ron Wolf. "I'm really proud of what he's accomplished, because he did it all on his own."

That's not quite how Eliot Wolf remembers it.

"The first time I was in a war room was the Packers' 1993 draft, when I was 11 years old," he recalls. "Dad might have wanted me to stay out of the way for the first round, but I got to come in after that.

"He had just traded back into the first round for George Teague."

Wisconsin became a football wonderland beyond Eliot's wildest imagination. He met quarterback Brett Favre, head coach Mike Holmgren and a staff that included future head coaches Jon Gruden, Andy Reid, Steve Mariucci, Ray Rhodes and Dick Jauron. He got to know Ted Thompson, whom his dad hired in 1992 and is GM of the Packers now.

"I learned more about scouting and how to put a team together through osmosis," Eliot said. "I think Dad wanted me to develop without specific direction."

For the youngest of Ron's five children — three daughters from a previous marriage and two sons with his wife Edie — drafts were a big part of Eliot

living the dream.

"Dad's temperament during draft weeks was incredibly relaxed," Eliot said. "By that point, he had worked so hard in preparing. He knew what he wanted to do, what he wanted to get.

"He just outworked everyone else. That was his thing from the time he was with the Raiders. It was countless hours watching film, going to more colleges than probably any other GM at the time.

"He didn't have a lot of different people screening players before they got to him. Dad was just an old scout basically.

"He was gone a lot. I never really thought about that as a negative thing. If he was happy doing that, I think it's great."

As a fifth-grader in Green Bay, Eliot was assigned to describe what he wanted to be when he grew up. The paper wrote itself. He wanted to be a scout.

"I knew dad was good at what he did, just from the way people always talked about him," Eliot says. "People still come up and tell me how great dad was to them. He treated people with great respect.

"As an evaluator, he was blunt, and people appreciated the honesty.

"I think some people were in awe of him. I know I was."

Eliot was Green Bay's director of pro personnel before his promotion. The Packers' season ended Jan. 18 with a playoff loss to Seattle. Two weeks later, Ron was elected to the Hall of Fame.

"It floored me," Eliot said. "I cried, mostly because I knew how much it meant to my dad.

"Even before that, when he called to tell me he had been nominated, he couldn't talk. It was the first and only time he's been like that."

The unique bond led to Ron asking Eliot to be his Hall of Fame presenter. ■

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