

Kenn's Daughter Leads Campaign for HOF Bid

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Emily Adams atlantafalcons.com

Falcons Ring of Honor member and former offensive lineman Mike Kenn made the list of top 26 semifinalists for the 2015 Pro Football Hall of Fame with the help of his daughter, Lisa Kenn.

Pure jumping-for-joy excitement; you know, the kind that makes your heart feel like it's going to beat right out of your chest.

For Lisa Kenn, the oldest daughter of former Atlanta Falcons offensive lineman Mike Kenn, it was that kind of joy that made her do a happy dance while sitting in Atlanta's evening rush hour traffic a week and a half ago.

Lisa Kenn had just ended a phone call with former Atlanta Journal Constitution and Falcons beat writer Len Pasquarelli, who delivered the incredible news that her dad had made the top 26 semifinalists for the 2015 Pro Football Hall of Fame induction class. All the campaigning Lisa Kenn started in the summertime for her dad was finally starting to come to fruition.

"I thought my heart was going to explode with happiness," Lisa Kenn said.

A member of the Falcons Ring of Honor class of 2008, Mike Kenn has been retired from the game of football for 20 years and eligible for football's highest recognition for the last 15. Over the years, Lisa Kenn and her younger sister, Kristy, heard friends, family members and even strangers tell their dad that he'd get into the Hall of Fame one day; he deserved to.

The wheels started turning after fellow Falcons Ring of Honor member and former defensive lineman Claude Humphrey was bestowed with the highest honor 33 years after retiring from the NFL. This event added fuel to their mounting fire. As a family they thought, why not?



And so the campaigning for the 2015 HOF induction began, including a Twitter name to help get the message out to the public.

Immediately, Mike Kenn's oldest daughter took the reins, starting off by contacting the right people. With help from her younger sister and her mom, Joanie, it was off to the races.

"It's a recognition of how much they love their dad, that they're willing to put forth this time and effort," Mike Kenn said.

Receiving letters of endorsement from former players and coaches was the first step in the ongoing process, a task that intimidated Lisa Kenn. Coming from an old-school family, she, along with everyone else, doesn't enjoy seeking recognition, especially her five-time Pro Bowler dad.

"That was a really hard thing for me to do because I don't like asking people for help," Lisa Kenn said. "This whole calling, not just people, but guys – some of them are hall-of-famers, big-deal guys – and asking them to help not just me, but my dad, was kind of a nerve-racking experience."

Lisa Kenn encountered those who wouldn't return her call, and others who brushed off the request. The thought of her dad joining the modern era greats who have come before him kept moving her forward.

As the campaigning continued, the Kenns got to relive some of the three-time First-Team All-Pro's great memories from high school, college, and his career, including being selected 13th overall in the first round of the 1978 NFL Draft. Holding the Falcons' franchise record for games played and games started at 251, he continued excelling throughout his 17 year career, including 11 recovered fumbles.



Engrained to work hard from an early age, Mike Kenn did just that. It helped that he had natural talent, but because he wasn't built to be an offensive lineman he had to train harder than other guys in his position.

The challenge of the game alone kept him playing, but it also made him take a step back and look at it one game at a time over the years.

"I knew one, you were one injury away from your career being over," Mike Kenn said. "And two, you were one person away from somebody being better than you."

Both Mike Kenn and his daughter have accepted the reality of the circumstance and understand that the situation is out of their control. Approaching it this way allows them to keep their emotions in check throughout the process.

They aren't shy, however, about thinking of what that day will feel like if and when it comes.

"I'll feel a complete sense of satisfaction," Mike Kenn said. "Meaning that all the work, all the hard work, all the effort I put forward, all the pain and anguish which (players) go through, which includes the winning and the losing, I will feel very satisfied that it was a job well-done."

For Lisa Kenn, it would be a moment of pure joy and happiness much greater than what she felt when she found out Mike Kenn made it onto the list of semifinalists. With tears in her eyes, it was clear how much it would mean not only to her, but to the rest of her family, including No. 78.

With the list of 26 whittling down to 15 in early January, Lisa Kenn continues reaching out to her dad's former teammates for letters. She is rounding up statistics to send to the selectors to help draw a comparison between her dad and those like him who are already members of the HOF.

If Mike Kenn makes it through the next wave, the final voting will take place Jan. 31, 2015. If his name isn't announced as one of the 2015 inductees, Lisa Kenn and her army of family and friends plan to continue the campaign.

"The more you whisper about something, the louder it gets," Lisa Kenn said. "That's the goal."

Posted by Rick Gosselin on October 2, 2014 at 12:01 am

No Justice in Atlanta

By Rick Gosselin

Talk of Fame Network

Great players make for great teams. The 1960s Green Bay Packers are proof of that with 11 Hall of Fame players to show for their five championship teams.

But what about the great players on bad teams? They miss out on championships — and too often they miss out on Canton.

The Atlanta Falcons were a bad team for a long time — and it has cost offensive tackles George Kunz and Mike Kenn Hall of Fame consideration.

It took the Falcons 13 years to manage their first winning season, 15 years to win a division title and 26 years to win a playoff game. A lot of bad football was played along the way. But not necessarily by bad players.

Kunz went to five Pro Bowls in a span of six years (1969-74) as a right offensive tackle for the Falcons. Then Kenn went to five consecutive Pro Bowls (1980-84) as a left tackle for the Falcons. But neither has ever been a finalist for the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Kunz moved on to the Baltimore Colts in his eighth season and went to three more Pro Bowls. That's eight total Pro Bowls — as many as Art Shell and more than Ron Yary, Dan Dierdorf, Bob Brown and Rayfield Wright from his era. Yet those five tackles are all in the Hall of Fame and Kunz has never even been discussed.

That puzzles Ted Marchibroda, who coached Kunz at Baltimore.

“When he came to the Colts, he was the only guy we added from our 2-12 team and we went 10-4,” Marchibroda said. “At Atlanta, he was a Pro Bowler on the NFC side. When he came to us, he became a Pro Bowler on the AFC side — and was voted team captain of the AFC team that first year. That's an indication of what others thought of him.”

Kunz was a team captain in college at Notre Dame and at both Atlanta and Baltimore in the NFL.

“As a lineman, he's the best offensive leader I've ever been around,” Marchibroda said. “His teammates followed him. He made as many Pro Bowls as the Yarys, Shells and Browns. I would rather have him than those guys. I had Bob Brown in L.A. Bob may have been a better athlete but you can't compare them as leaders. His leadership sets him apart. He was special.”

Kenn also had dynamic leadership skills, serving on the executive committee of the NFL Players Association for 17 years, including a stint as president. On the field he started 251 games for the Falcons. The only offensive lineman in NFL history to start more was Hall of Famer Bruce Matthews at 293 games.

Kenn saw — and blocked — most of the great pass rushers in NFL history on that left side: Hall of Famers Bruce Smith, Lawrence Taylor, Derrick Thomas, Richard Dent, Fred Dean, Chris Doleman, Howie Long, Dan Hampton, Lee Roy Selmon, Ted Hendricks and Elvin Bethea.

Despite that level of competition, Kenn was voted to the All-NFC team six times and had his jersey number 78 retired by Falcons.

Jim Hanifan was one of the game's great offensive line coaches. He coached Hall of Famer Dan Dierdorf and Hall of Fame candidate Orlando Pace in addition to Kenn. He said he'd “put Kenn right up there with those two players” and added if the Falcons had won a Super Bowl, Kenn would already be in the Hall of Fame by now.

But the Falcons didn't and Kenn is not. Neither is Kunz. They can't even get into the room as finalists to be discussed. Their combined record of 144-214-4 with the Falcons is standing in the way.

And that's a shame. Not all of the NFL's great players played on great teams. But no one seems to notice those who don't.

Whatever happened to: Mike Kenn

Posted: 5:28 p.m. Thursday, July 30, 2015

By I.J. Rosenberg - For the AJC

What he did: Mike Kenn may never make it into the Pro Football Hall of Fame but it will not be because he wasn't one of the top offensive linemen of his time.

Kenn, who wore No. 78 and played all 17 years with the Falcons, was once praised by a future Hall of Fame head coach. **"I've never seen any offensive tackle with his agility and quickness."** Those words came from the late and great coach **Bill Walsh**, whose 49ers certainly had their fill of Kenn and his ability to protect the quarterback from some of the best rushers in NFL. Kenn started in all 251 games he played for the Falcons, once playing in 94 consecutive games, and went to five straight Pro Bowls (1980-84).

But it was an auspicious beginning.

From Evanston, Ill., Kenn stood 6 feet 6 but weighed only 198 pounds when he came out of high school, looking more like a basketball player than an offensive lineman. In high school, he also played lacrosse and hockey and had very few college football offers. But received a last-minute call from Michigan and headed to Ann Arbor.

His freshman year was a disaster. He got hurt and struggled in the classroom, the lack of studying almost costing him his scholarship. But after a serious sit-down with Wolverines coach Bo Schembechler, he rebounded to start his next three years and played in some memorable games against rival Ohio State.

When the NFL draft came in 1978, Green Bay wanted him. Then-Packers offensive line coach Bill Curry was interested in moving Kenn to tight end. Kenn said he would do it, but before Green Bay could take him with the 26th overall pick, the Falcons jumped on him at No. 13.

It wasn't long before Kenn was in the lineup with the Falcons and **made the all-rookie team in 1978**. In his **second season, he allowed only 4 1/2 sacks and was penalized four times**.

That season the Falcons made it to the playoffs for the first time in franchise history and in 1980; he was voted as a consensus All-Pro on a team that was thought to be the favorite to win

the Super Bowl. That Falcons team, however, lost a heartbreaking game to Dallas in the playoffs when the Cowboys overcame a 14-point fourth-quarter deficit.

From there, Kenn played on nine straight losing teams but he continued to dominate. **He went 23 straight games without being penalized.** While the Falcons struggled, the offensive line actually was very solid, including such players as Jeff Van Note, Bill Fralic, R.C. Thielemann, Chris Hinton and Jamie Dukes.

In a memorable game 1991 against New Orleans, he **shut down defensive end Pat Swilling, who had come into the game as the league's sacker leader** but finished with none against Kenn.

Over his NFL career, Kenn grew to 286 pounds and retired after the 1994 season. He actually was offered a contract by coach June Jones to come back for '95, but he declined, saying, "I was done mentally. They wanted me to come back as a player-coach and teach Lincoln Kennedy how to play. June was once a teammate and friend of mine and I knew it is time to retire when someone like that is your boss."

After football, Kenn moved into the restaurant business and started a foundation to give back to the community. He had a six-year run as chairman of the Fulton County Commission, drawing on his experience as past president of the NFL Players Association. He gave up his chairmanship to run the nonprofit Georgians for Better Transportation.

In 2008, Kenn was inducted into the Falcons Ring of Honor, which includes Tommy Nobis, Van Note, Steve Bartkowski, Claude Humphrey, Williams Andrews, Gerald Riggs, Jessie Tuggle and Deion Sanders.

Last year, Kenn's daughter, Lisa, started a campaign to help get her father into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. While he didn't make it, he was named as one of the top 26 semifinalists for this year's class.

Where he lives: Kenn, 59, lives in Atlanta and has two daughters, Lisa and Kristy. He has been married to wife Joanie for 36 years.

What he does now: He remains very active and is president of the startup Government and Municipal Finance Systems. He works out every day and has lost 45 pounds since his playing days.

On showing up at Michigan weighing 195 pounds: "I walked into the conference room where Bo and his coaches were and he looked up and Bo never called you by anything other than your last name until you left Michigan. He said, 'Kenn, what position do you want to play?' I said I will play anything and he looked around the room and the offensive line coach said he would take me. But in my first year, I dislocated my elbow in training camp and almost flunked out of school with a 1.2 grade-point average. Bo calls me in and said, 'I guess you are not going to be playing

for Michigan next year.' He said the NCAA has a minimum of a 1.8 and the Big Ten was at 2.0. I answered the call and got a 3.8 the second semester. I also came back to Michigan 45 pounds heavier and walked into that meeting room again and Bo said, 'Kenn, what the hell have you been doing? You look great.'"

On his biggest game in college: "My junior year in Columbus against Ohio State ... it was the hardest hitting game I think I ever played in. And it was Bo against Woody (Hayes). There was no score at half and we got the ball, scored, got the ball again and scored and then got the ball again and scored and went for two and it was 22-0. I remember Bo taking the first team out with about four minutes left. And I went to the sideline and there were 80,000 fans in the place and you could hear a pin drop. I looked over at Woody on the other sideline and he had his arms crossed and the scowl on his face and there was no one within 10 yards of him. That was my greatest game."

On being drafted by the Falcons: "We had pro day and I ran a fast 40, and Bill Curry of the Packers came up to me and said they wanted to draft me and change me into a tight end. He said, 'Go down there with our receivers coach and catch some balls.' I caught all 50 and Bill then told me I couldn't run a route worth a damn, but they would teach me how. The irony of all that is if I would have been taken by the Packers and moved to tight end, I don't think I would have ever lasted 17 years in the NFL."

On why his technique was so solid: "I had to compensate for a lack of bulk. I couldn't beat people with size. I had the best line coach (Jerry Hanlon) at Michigan. He taught me the fundamentals of leverage and angles. Also, I think the only other lineman that had my athleticism was Anthony Munoz. I also watched a lot of film, frame by frame."

On his great game against Swilling: "Pat was a great player and we played twice a year, once at my house and once at his. He had advantage because his place was louder, which didn't give us a snap-count advantage. There are three kinds of pass rushers: the instinct rusher like a Lawrence Taylor or Bruce Smith, who determines what move they are going to make as the play is going on; there is the predetermined rusher and they are going to uphill speed rush you like a Pat Swilling; then there is the setup artist like a Richard Dent who may slow-rush you at times to set you up and then make a big move when they have to. The thing about Pat was, I watched his film over and over and nine out of 10 times, I knew what he was going to do."

On playing on nine consecutive losing teams: "That is my whole point about the Hall of Fame. It is much harder to play at a higher level with a poor cast of characters."

On the loss to Dallas in 1980: "We sat on the ball and let them back in the game. But the big play came when it was third-and-1 and we could have knocked two more minutes off the clock with a first down and we still had a two touchdown lead. We had a play called 'Zero 1 Trap,' which William Andrews ran and worked all year. But before the ball was snapped, Ed 'Too Tall'

Jones stepped into the neutral zone which was OK back then if you got back. But he never got back on his side before it was snapped. And he was right in the hole to make the play. I watched that film and he was offside. Then we went into a prevent defense and Danny White just stood back there and could throw the ball to anyone.”

On getting into the Falcons Ring of Honor: “It was great for me and my family but also for the people back home because I came from a blue-collar area and a lot of them were living vicariously through me being a football player.”

On whether he should get into the Pro Football Hall of Fame: “I do believe my play merits the Hall, but I don’t have a vote. The thing is, during my career I think my sack ratio was low and I played left tackle uncovered with no help. I played against all the great pass rushers that are in the Hall. My daughter started a campaign and finally got me into the semifinals. But I have stayed at arm’s length. I do hope I get there while I am still eligible over the next three or four years because after that, I would have to be selected as an old-timer and there are an awful lot of good football players in that category.”

On his health: “I am doing remarkably well. I will be 60 in February and my back bothers me a little but that is all. I also am not showing any problems with my head. I have always been a hard worker, I work out, eat right and I am very thankful.”