

October \_\_, 2015

Attn: Pro Football Hall of Fame Induction Committee  
2121 George Halas Dr NW  
Canton, OH 44708

Re: Mike Kenn Induction

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Richard Berthelsen, and I am writing to support the candidacy of Mike Kenn as an inductee to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. I worked as a staff lawyer for the National Football League Players Association (“NFLPA”) from 1972 to 2012, and was privileged to experience firsthand the phenomenal growth of the National Football League over that 40 year period.

I was also privileged to have known and worked with many prior inductees to the Hall, including John Mackey, Willie Brown, Elvin Bethea, John Riggins, and former NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle. And most importantly for me, I worked very closely with 1987 inductee Gene Upshaw, who appointed me as NFLPA General Counsel of the NFLPA soon after he became its Executive Director in 1983. Twenty five years later, I succeeded Gene as Acting Executive Director after his tragic death from pancreatic cancer in August of 2008. I then resumed my position as NFLPA General Counsel in 2009 after DeMaurice Smith was elected to succeed Gene, and I eventually retired after the 2011 lockout was settled.

For much of my career I worked with Mike Kenn as a player leader, first when he was the Player Rep for the Atlanta Falcons in 1982 and later when he served as President from 1989 through 1996. I will leave it to others to argue why Mike Kenn should be inducted in the Hall of Fame from an on-field prospective. He probably has playing statistics that are better than some offensive linemen already in the Hall of Fame, and some that are perhaps not as good. But to me he has one qualification that no previous inductee has ever had, with the possible exception of Gene Upshaw: As President of the NFLPA he helped bring about a settlement with the owners in 1993 that started the longest and most productive era of labor peace in NFL history.

I have heard it said that various Hall of Fame inductees from the past had “set the bar” for today’s players, that they were “pioneers,” or that they had helped “build the game” through their performances on the field. But to me, players don’t “build the game” or become “pioneers” merely by playing the game well. They do it instead by making the game better for their fellow players and the players who come after them, *in addition* to playing well.

Mike Kenn did just that. He was a three time All-Pro and a five time Pro Bowler. He played one of the longest penalty-free streaks in NFL history, and allowed the fewest sacks of

any left tackle in the league for a number of years. He started every game he played (251 of them), and was selected the NFLPA's "Whizzer White Man of the Year" in 1991, one of the most prestigious awards an NFL player can win.

But he was also a Player Rep for the Atlanta Falcons during the long and difficult strike in 1982, and helped bring about a CBA settlement in November of that year that kept the season from being cancelled. The next year he was elected to the NFLPA Executive Committee, and began a leadership career with the NFLPA that took it through the most tumultuous years in its history, including a four-week strike in 1987, the subsequent decertification of the union in 1989, and the historic settlement in 1993, which occurred in his fourth year as NFLPA President. That settlement created an economic partnership between the owners and the players, and Mike Kenn helped implement that partnership and helped make it successful in the years that followed.

But just as importantly for the players, the 1993 settlement brought unrestricted free agency to the league for the first time in history. While Mike never had free agency for himself as a player, he saw to it that players who came after him would have that privilege, and the game has been better for it ever since. Thanks to free agency, players can now move to teams that can best apply their skills, and teams can improve "from last to first" in their divisions in a short period of time. And thanks to free agency, the league can continue to attract the interest of fans during what used to be considered "down time" in the offseason. Since 1993, the free agency/salary cap system has served the game very well, and Mike Kenn deserves much of the credit for its success.

I will admit to being biased, but I think it's time the Induction Committee recognized that players can help "build the game" by serving as elected leaders of the NFL Players Association, in addition to performing well on the playing field. Mike Kenn---whom I had the pleasure to know and work with for over 19 years while he was playing, and for almost 20 years since--excelled in both categories, and for that reason I believe he should be a 2016 inductee into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Thank you for considering my views on this matter.

Respectfully,

Richard A. Berthelsen  
Former General Counsel, NFLPA