



# Obituary: Ray Mathews / All-Pro Steeler, fan favorite from '50s

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By Stephen J. Nesbitt / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Ray Mathews, a two-time All-Pro selection and perhaps the Steelers' most versatile weapon of the 1950s, died Sunday in Marion, Pa. He was 86.

Mr. Mathews, primarily a wide receiver, played for the Steelers from 1951-59 before being selected by the Dallas Cowboys in an expansion draft in 1960, his final year in the NFL. In 10 seasons, he scored 45 touchdowns — 34 receiving, five rushing, two passing, three on punt returns and one on a fumble recovery.

In 2007, Mr. Mathews was named to the Steelers Legends team, which consists of the best Steelers from the pre-1970 era, as voted on by Steelers officials and local journalists.

“A heck of a man,” his daughter, Cathy, said Wednesday. “He was very humble. People wouldn’t know he played football and had such a great record. He would never bring it up. My sister was, like, 11 before she realized our dad was kind of famous.

“He was a very loving, caring person.”

Mr. Mathews, a McKeesport High School and Clemson University graduate, was drafted in the seventh round in 1951. He was backup to running back Fran Rogel before moving to receiver. Those two were WPIAL rivals in high school, friends in the pros and rivals again when Mr. Mathews coached five seasons at Braddock High School and Mr. Rogel coached North Braddock Scott.

Bill Priatko, a Steelers teammate, remembers Mr. Mathews as an outstanding receiver, a loyal friend

and the best card player he's ever seen.

"Always had great regard for him as a man," Mr. Priatko said. "Ray was not only a local favorite from high school, but he was a favorite of Steelers fans back in the '50s. He represented the black and gold in an outstanding manner."

After his playing days, he also made coaching stops with the Washington Redskins and the Calgary Stampeders of the Canadian Football League. He was inducted into the Clemson Athletics Hall of Fame in 1978.

Versatile on and off the gridiron, Mr. Mathews also played four seasons of minor-league baseball early in the 1950s. He spent several summers with the Anderson Rebels and the Greenville Spinners, St. Louis Browns affiliates. As the story goes, the Browns told Mr. Mathews he could make the majors if only he would quit football and play full time on the diamond.

Mr. Mathews, an avid golfer, was in good physical health but suffered from dementia the past few years. In October 2013, he went on a walk near his home and was later reported missing by his family. He was found the next morning, briefly hospitalized and treated for hypothermia.

Surviving are his wife of 66 years, Ruth; two daughters, Cathy of Marion and Jenny of Mercer; three sons, Raymond Jr. of Branford, Conn., John of Marion and Tim of Mercer; and 10 grandchildren.

The family will receive visitors at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Cunningham Funeral Home in Grove City.

There will be a private ceremony on Wednesday.

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