



The New York Times | <http://nyti.ms/1CsRcJG>

PRO FOOTBALL

Ken Stabler, Quarterback Who Led Raiders to Title, Dies at 69

By **RICHARD GOLDSTEIN** JULY 10, 2015

Ken Stabler, a precision passer who was famously cool under pressure in becoming one of pro football's leading quarterbacks of the 1970s and engineering the Oakland Raiders' first Super Bowl victory, died on Wednesday in Gulfport, Miss. He was 69.

The cause was colon cancer, which had been diagnosed in February, his family said. The family said his brain and spinal cord were donated to a Boston University center that conducts research into degenerative brain disease among athletes.

One of football's uncommon left-handed quarterbacks, Stabler was named to the National Football League's all-decade team for the 1970s and was a four-time Pro Bowl selection, though he missed out on entering the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

"I've often said, if I had one drive to win a game to this day, and I had a quarterback to pick, I would pick Kenny," John Madden, Stabler's coach with the Raiders, said in a statement upon his death. "When you think about the Raiders, you think about Ken Stabler."

Stabler was drafted by the Raiders in 1968 out of the University of Alabama,

where he played for Bear Bryant's powerful teams.

As the Raider quarterback from 1970 to 1979, he led the N.F.L. twice in touchdown passes and twice in passing completion percentage. He was among the top 10 quarterbacks in passing yardage seven times. He was named the N.F.L.'s most valuable player in 1974.

Stabler propelled the Raiders to a 32-14 victory over the Minnesota Vikings in Super Bowl XI in January 1977, throwing a touchdown pass to tight end Dave Casper and setting up another score with a long completion to wide receiver Fred Biletnikoff.

Afterward, he seemed much in the mold of a franchise known for its swagger since its American Football League days.

"They've called us a lot of renegades, a lot of people nobody else wanted," Stabler was quoted by The Boston Globe. "Well, maybe we are. But we play together and we won."

Stabler was known as the Snake for his elusiveness as a runner. Denzil Hollis, his football coach in junior high school, once told Sports Illustrated that he gave Stabler the nickname. "He'd run 200 yards to score from 20 yards out," Hollis recalled.

But knee problems eventually limited Stabler's mobility, and he filled out to a 6-foot-3, 215-pound frame.

Stabler's most memorable play in his Alabama years, known as the "run in the mud," came in 1967 when he ran 53 yards around right end in a downpour to score in a 7-3 victory over Alabama's rival Auburn in the annual game known as the Iron Bowl.

Kenneth Michael Stabler was born on Christmas Day 1945 in Foley, Ala.

He played for Alabama from 1965 to 1967, an heir to Joe Namath, who had taken the Crimson Tide to a national championship before joining the Jets. As a

junior, Stabler led Alabama to an 11-0 season, concluding with a rout of Nebraska in the Sugar Bowl.

After his 10 seasons with the Raiders, Stabler played for the Houston Oilers for two seasons and the New Orleans Saints for his final three.

In July 1981, The New York Times reported that Stabler had been investigated by the F.B.I. while with Oakland and Houston for a continuing association with a New Jersey gambling figure. The Times said the inquiries were inconclusive and eventually dropped.

The N.F.L. subsequently conducted its own investigation and allowed Stabler to sign with New Orleans as a free agent in 1982 after Commissioner Pete Rozelle warned him to avoid “undesirable elements” or be subject to disciplinary action (although he said that Stabler had denied any wrongdoing to him). He was never accused of a crime in connection with the matter.

Stabler threw for 194 touchdowns and 27,938 yards in his 15 N.F.L. seasons. He was later a radio analyst for Alabama football games.

He is survived by his daughters, Kendra, Alexa and Marissa; his sister, Carolyn Bishop; and two grandchildren.

Stabler was involved in some memorable plays.

In what became known as the Holy Roller, he fumbled the ball forward toward Casper, who recovered it in the end zone for a game-winning touchdown against the San Diego Chargers in 1978.

“I fumbled it on purpose,” Stabler was quoted as saying by the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

As a result, the N.F.L. changed its rule on forward fumbles.

In the play that came to be called Sea of Hands, he lofted a pass into the end zone that Raiders running back Clarence Davis caught in the midst of several

Miami Dolphins defenders, resulting in a 1974 A.F.C. playoff victory for Oakland.

Casper, his tight end with the Raiders and the Oilers, once reflected on Stabler's persona.

“He knows everything there is to know on a football field, but when they give him his game plan on Wednesday he probably takes it and throws it in the wastebasket,” Casper was quoted by Paul Zimmerman in “The New Thinking Man's Guide to Pro Football” (1984).

“I don't think he ever cared about losing. Winning is fine. Losing? So what? He'd rather win the gamble and force a pass in there. He'd rather do it the hard way.”

A version of this article appears in print on July 10, 2015, on page B7 of the New York edition with the headline: Ken Stabler Is Dead at 69; Led Raiders to N.F.L. Title .