

2013 Athletic Hall of Fame Honoree



JOHNNY OLSZEWSKI

CLASS OF 1949 (1930-1996)

The Great Johnny "O" is a name that generations of Saints have heard about and honored throughout the decades. John was a natural born athlete but more importantly, a competitor. He competed head-on in every imaginable activity that included winning or losing. From marbles, to bocce ball, flipping coins, races on land or in water, to diving from any level, trading punches and every team sport, John refused to lose. He seemed to have a zero threshold of pain and loved physical contact. Pat Summerall, John Madden's side kick on Monday night football, on hearing of John's passing said during a break in the game, Johnny "O" was the toughest football player he had ever known.

Olszewski's athletic career was remarkable. He gained national fame for his football prowess, first as a two-time All-American while playing for UC-Berkeley, and later as a professional football star. But no story recounting "Great Moments in Sports" related to St. Anthony would be complete without the story of Johnny "O" leading the Saints in the 1948 season to the CIF final championship game against Santa Barbara High.

On December 11, 1948 the SAINTS, up against a school four times our enrollment and led by Punky Bowman and Eddie Mathews (Baseball Hall of Fame), were severe underdogs as Johnny "O" had a severe thigh bruise from a previous playoff game and was unable to play. John had made it possible for the SAINTS to reach the playoffs and his leadership and will-to-win carried the team through to one of the proudest days in the history of St. Anthony High School. It was truly a Horatio Alger story and is often compared with the Hoosier story.

In 1948, John Olszewski was named CIF Player of the Year, California Player of the Year and All-American, gaining 1661 yards in 139 carries for an 11.9 average and 27 touchdowns. John is in the top three in almost every rushing and scoring category in St. Anthony history, many of which he held for over 50 years.

Born in 1930, John Peter Olszewski attended Edison Elementary and St. Matthew's School, graduating to attend St. Anthony High School in 1946. At St. Anthony, his football career was nothing short of spectacular. He played varsity football all four years, was Team Captain as a junior, and received All-City, All-CIF, All-Catholic honors in both his junior and senior years. John was named CIF Player of the Year as a senior. In addition to football, John lettered in baseball and basketball, participated in track and was a member of the Drama and Glee Clubs.

At the University of California, Berkeley, John played football for four years. He led his collegiate team to the Rose Bowl and was honored as an All-American for two successive years. He remains the 7th all-time leading rusher in Cal history, and was inducted into the Cal Hall of Fame in 1993. Johnny was selected as the 4th overall pick by the Chicago Cardinals in the 1953 NFL draft. He was named an All-Pro twice during his 10 year professional career. The record books indicate that he rushed for 3320 yards and 16 touchdowns while playing for the Cardinals, Washington Redskins, Detroit Lions and Denver Broncos. John was elected to the Long Beach Athletic Hall of Fame in 1975.

Following his athletic career, Johnny served as a Long Beach lifeguard for 25 years – chief lifeguard for five years – until retirement in 1973. He was a sales representative for Long Beach Welding Supplies in 1985 when he was inducted in the St. Anthony High School Hall of Fame.

John had four children and four grandchildren, lived in Long Beach until his passing in 1996.

