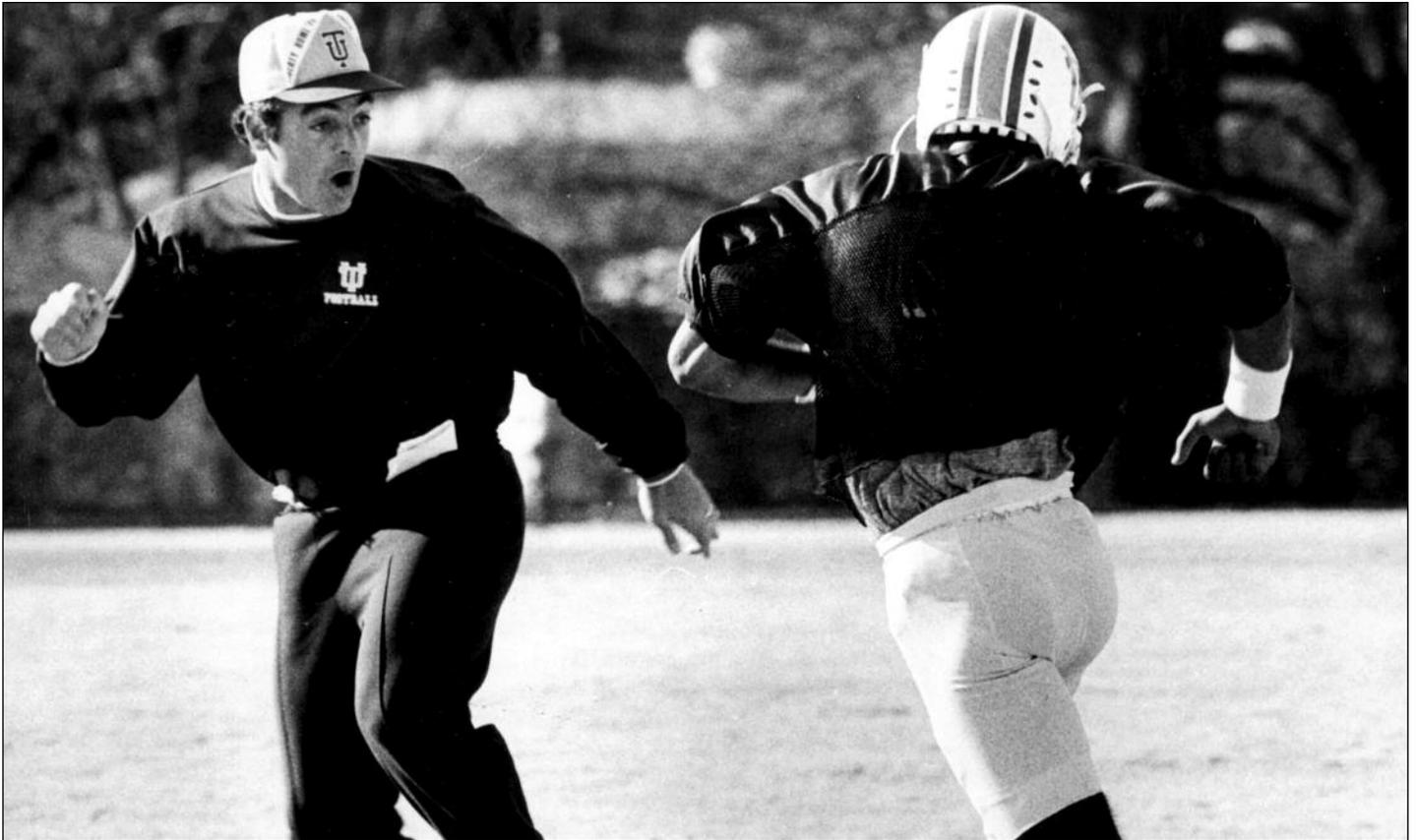


INDUCTEE PROFILE



Known for his enthusiasm, Buddy Geis backpedals during a passing drill at Tulane in his early years as a college football coach.

In his blood

Geis credits Altoona roots for his love of football

By Jim Lane
Altoona Mirror

The story goes that when Buddy Geis was born and smacked on the butt he laughed. The doctor immediately told his mom her son would grow up to be everybody's buddy.

"I'm not sure if that's true or not," Geis said from his home in Neptune Beach, Fla., a Jacksonville suburb, "but my mom called me Buddy ever since that day. Actually, she named me Wayne after John Wayne, but everyone's always called me Buddy."

The youngest of 10 children — seven boys and three girls — born to Gilbert and Bernadette (Bernie) Geis, Buddy grew up in Altoona and was a high school football star at Altoona Area High School.

Geis, who spent 30-plus years

coaching professional and major college football, has never forgotten his roots.

"Altoona created me," Geis, a member of the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2010, said. "My family and my friends gave me the foundation. My teachers and my coaches in Altoona made it happen.

"They helped put me in the right position, and I was fortunate to make the best of it."

Because of his brothers and the 8th Ward neighborhood he lived in, Geis was always interested in sports.

"Neighborhoods were so big back then," he said. "We were always playing football, baseball or basketball in the street or the alley. We were outside constantly.

"Altoona will always be the greatest city ever to me."

As a youngster, Geis and his friends climbed the fence at Mansion Park to watch the Altoona Mountain Lions play. A few years later, Geis became a standout player for the Mountain Lions, winning the Joe Cohen Blanket as the MVP his senior year.

"I got to know him in junior high," long-time Altoona friend and teammate Mel Frye said of Geis. "He played at Roosevelt and I played at Keith, and, as junior high kids, we didn't like each other. In high school, we became best friends."

Frye was the quarterback and Geis was a wide receiver-running back for the Mountain Lions.

"Buddy was such a clutch player," Frye recalled. "He never lacked confidence, and he backed it up. As a sophomore, he made a game-saving

tackle against McKeesport, and his career was off and running.

"After college, we both coached at Altoona High for Earl Strohm, and even then, I could tell he would have a great career in coaching. He really liked the passing game and was very innovated. His success hasn't surprised me.

"He was a great athlete and a great friend. What he's accomplished is amazing."

Geis credits Strohm with a lot of his success.

"Coach Strohm made such a huge impact on my career," Geis said. "He didn't care how fast you were, but if you couldn't block or tackle, you couldn't play for him. He wanted you to be tough and to play and work hard.

"That's why people succeed. I grew up in a family that worked hard, that's the way I remember Altoona."

Geis loved Strohm's tough mentality and discipline.

"Tough and physical, that's why we won," he said. "Coach (Wally) Fields, Coach (Harry) Dinges and Coach (Ron) Rickens — what a staff!

"They gave me a great foundation; I was so lucky."

A defensive back-running back-wide receiver, Geis started his college career at Flagstaff, Ariz., a Division I school, but left after a year. Then, after a year at Trinidad, Col. as a wide receiver, he landed at Lock Haven State College, a big turning point in his life.

"That's where I met Bob Weller," Geis said. "Hubert Jack, the legendary football and wrestling coach, was the coach my first year and Weller took over the next year. After I was done playing, I helped Weller coach one year."

Weller encouraged Geis to get into the coaching field, and the rest is history, as they say.

"I called Coach Strohm, and he got me into Altoona," Geis said. "I coached defensive backs and wide receivers two years at Altoona."



Buddy shares a laugh with Dallas Cowboys' quarterback Troy Aikman.

After two years at AHS, Buddy and his wife, Jere, went west where Buddy became a graduate assistant coach at the University of Arizona, and his college coaching career took off from there. In the meantime, Jere gave birth to their son, Adam.

"Back then, grad assistants did recruiting, and I was on the road when my son was born," Geis said. "I signed three kids out of Pittsburgh, and Jim Young, the head coach, called me in May and hired me full-time. I was paid \$12,000 and got a car ... we thought we were millionaires."

After a year and a half at Arizona, Geis went to Tulane with Larry Smith, who had been defensive coordinator at Arizona. From Tulane, Geis went to Kansas for a year under Mike Gottfried.

Then Lindy Infante, who Geis had met at Tulane, became head coach of the Jacksonville team in the USFL and asked Geis to join him.

"Lawrenceville, Kansas, or Jacksonville, Florida? It was an easy decision," said Geis, noting his family had grown to four by then, with the

addition of daughter Jeni.

When the USFL folded, Geis was off to Memphis State as offensive coordinator for two years under Pepper Rodgers. When the Green Bay Packers hired Infante as their head coach,

Geis left Memphis for his first job in the NFL.

"A kid from Altoona coaching the Green Bay Packers — how lucky can a guy be?" Geis said. "It was unreal."

Geis coached Packer receivers, including Sterling Sharpe, for five years. Sharpe will be Geis' Hall of Fame presenter.

"Green Bay will always be special to me," he said. "They have the greatest fans in the world. Dallas fans love you, but they want a Super Bowl every year. Packer fans always love you."

When the Packers dumped Infante and his staff after five years, it was back to the college game for Geis as offensive coordinator at Duke. However, when the Indianapolis Colts hired Infante as head man, Geis rejoined him in the NFL.

"I was so fortunate to work with Lindy for 11 years," Geis said. "He's an unbelievable offensive mind."

The feeling is mutual.

"The biggest compliment I can give Buddy Geis," Infante said, "is everytime I got a job, Buddy was one of the first guys I hired."

They worked together at Tulane, then in the NFL with the Packers and Colts.

"He's super intelligent, is a hard-working and dedicated guy with a lot of energy," Infante said of Geis. "He always portrays that to his players."

At Indy, Geis worked with quarterback Jim Harbaugh, now the coach at Stanford, and Marvin Harrison, one of the NFL's top receivers.

"That was a great experience," Geis said. "Coaching at Indy was



Geis bio

Sport: Football

High School: Altoona

College: Lock Haven

Hall of Fame achievement: Spent 30-plus years coaching professional and major college football, including nine in the NFL

Current residence: Neptune Beach, Fla.

close to being at Green Bay.”

Geis' final pro stop was Dallas where he was hired by Chan Gailey as quarterbacks coach. He worked closely with Troy Aikman, as well as wide receiver Michael Irvin.

“Troy Aikman was unbelievable,” Geis said. “He watched film every day. We went to the playoffs two years, but it's Super Bowl or nothing in Dallas, and the pressure was unbelievable.”

Even though Gailey was fired, Dallas owner Jerry Jones kept Geis on the staff for two years as a consultant.

“Jerry was super to me and my family,” Geis said.

When Gailey was hired as head coach at Georgia Tech, Geis was on the move again, joining the Yellow Jackets for five years as associate head coach.

“That's where I met and coached Calvin Johnson,” Geis said of Johnson, now a member of the Detroit Lions.

“I've coached guys like Sharpe, Harrison, Irvin, Harbaugh and Aikman, but Calvin Johnson is the greatest I've ever been around.”

Although he hasn't coached on the college or pro level for two years, Geis remains close to the game, working with college and professional players at various athletic performance



The standout of the Green Bay Packers' receiving corps, Sterling Sharpe (84), will serve as Buddy's Hall of Fame presenter.

camps in Florida.

“I'm happy what I'm doing,” he said, “and I see my family more, too.”

Geis and Jere, as well as their children, Adam, a high school coach in Jacksonville, and Jeni, a nurse, have lived all over the country, and he gives credit to them for never-ending support.

“Jere has always been my strength,” he said. “She's kept me going through the good times and bad. She's

my spark — my exclamation point.”

He considers his election to the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame the exclamation point to his coaching career.

“I can't thank Altoona enough, it's such a great honor,” he said. “It's great to be honored by the people who are special to you. I hope I've always made Altoona people proud of me.”

LESS FILLING

**MASTER DISTRIBUTOR
CITY BEVERAGE
OF ALTOONA, INC.**

**525 E. 6TH AVE.
ALTOONA, PA. 16602**

**"FAMILY OWNED & OPERATED"
SINCE 1949**

HALF THE CARBS OF BUD LIGHT[®]

Miller Lite contains 3.2 grams carbohydrates per 12 oz. while Bud Light contains 6.6 grams carbohydrates per 12 oz.