

INDUCTEE PROFILE

Another brick in the wall

Todd Benson's induction adds to family's legacy

By Jim Lane
Altoona Mirror

When you think about Blair County's first families of football, the name Benson always comes to mind.

Brad, Todd, Shawn, Troy. The Benson brothers. All were outstanding athletes at Altoona Area High School, and all four earned scholarships to play Division I college football.

Brad, the oldest, played at Penn State and later was a outstanding offensive tackle for the New York Giants, who won a Super Bowl during his tenure.

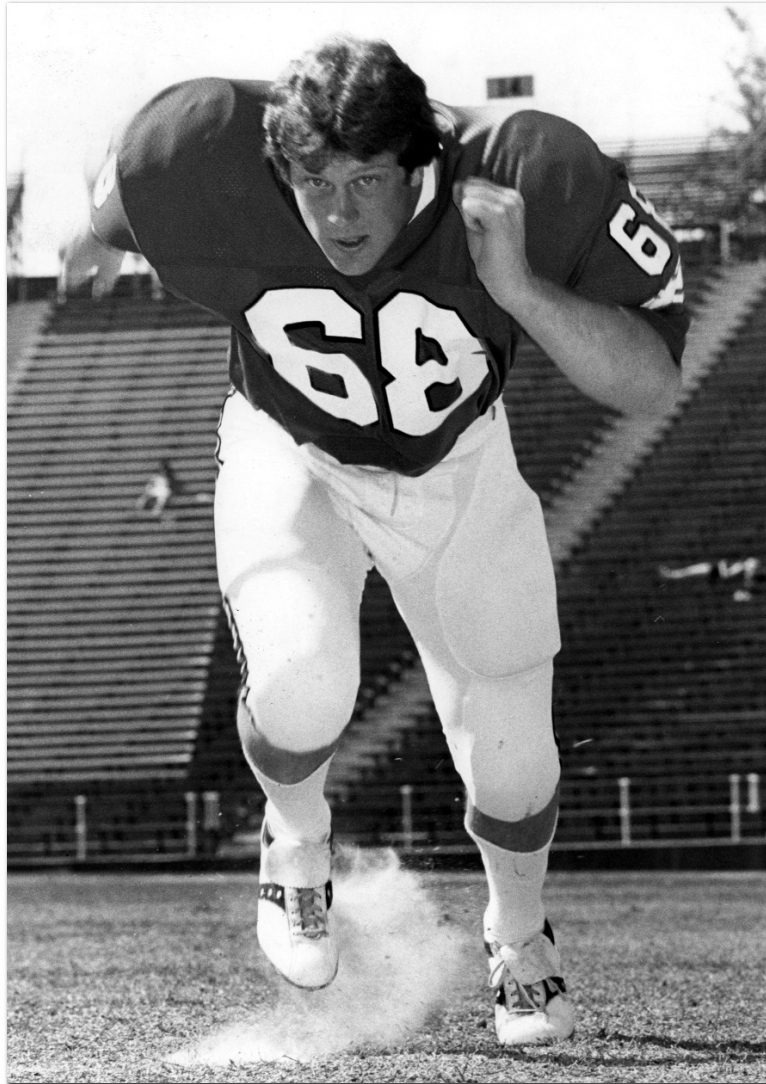
Todd and Shawn followed Brad, and both played at the University of Maryland. Troy, the youngest, made his mark as a linebacker at Pitt and later with the New York Jets.

"At the time when you're playing, you don't think much about it," Todd said. "It hits you later. It's pretty special and what makes it more special is that all four of us graduated."

Todd is the third Benson to be inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame, joining Brad, who was enshrined in 1990, and Troy, who was honored in 1992.

"It's great, and it's nice to join my brothers," Todd said. "I wasn't sure if I'd ever make it. I didn't know if my resume was good enough."

"There have been a lot of great ones from Altoona — (Mike) Reid, (John) Ebersole, (Steve) Lach, (Doug) West," he said of former Altoona High athletes in the Blair County Hall.



Todd was a three-year letterman and two-year starter for Maryland in the late 1970s.

Todd Benson made his own mark at Altoona High as a football player and wrestler, and as a golfer, too.

"Ron Rickens was the head coach and a great guy. I thought a lot of him," Todd said. "Tom Rogish was the linebackers coach, and Vince Nedimyer had the line. It was a very good staff."

Benson played tight end and linebacker, and he has fond memories of high school football.

"Defensively, I was usually left alone to roam and make tackles," he said. "My only regret was that I never scored a touchdown. I caught some passes, but I never made the end zone."

Rogish, now the head coach at Frostburg (Md.) State University, has fond memories of Benson.

"The thing I remember most about Todd was his intensity," Rogish said.

"Whether he was on the football field or the wrestling mat, he played at 100 miles an hour on every snap or every whistle.

His intensity raised the level of his teammates and coaches, too."

Rogish said Benson was a good role model as well.

"His gentlemanly attitude off the field carried into the classroom," Rogish said. "He was the ideal coachable player."

Rogish also said Benson was ahead of his time when it came to offseason workouts.

"He was a weight room junkie and trained year round," Rogish recalled. "As a coach, you wish you could have an all-around athlete like Todd on your team every year because of his leadership, dedication and work ethic."



Todd (68) was among the team leaders in tackles as a junior and senior at Maryland.

Todd also had a lot of success in wrestling, winning District 6 and Northwest Regional titles before losing in the state finals in 1977.

"I wrestled heavyweight most of the season, but dropped to 185 (pounds) for the tournament," he recalled. "I was undefeated until the state finals."

Marty Rusnak, Altoona High's former wrestling coach, said all of the Bensons were outstanding on the mats.

"They were always a joy to work with," Rusnak said. "They were all hard workers and enjoyable to coach, too. They were aggressive, physical and hated to lose."

"What I remember about Todd is that he had a nice demeanor off the mats, and I enjoyed that," Rusnak said. "But, when he stepped onto the mat — wow! That's all I can say — wow! The Bensons were great and never did anything out of the way."

Brad Benson won a state wrestling title, and Todd looked up to his big brother as both a football player and wrestler.

"He influenced me by his example," Todd said. "I saw what he did,

and I wanted to do similar things."

One of the things he considered was following Brad to Penn State.

"(Penn State) was the team, especially then," Todd said. "However, Maryland had an upcoming team. They were 11-0 my senior year in high school. I thought 'here's a program on the move.'"

So Todd took his talents to Maryland and lettered three years (1978-80) for coach Jerry Claiborne's Terps. He played in every game all three years and was a starter as a junior and senior. As a junior, he made 85 tackles, including five sacks and forced two fumbles. As a senior, he made 62 tackles and had eight career sacks. He had double-figure tackles four times and a career high of 14 against North Carolina State.

Todd, who said his playing weight probably topped out at 230 pounds, was a wide tackle or defensive end



Benson bio

Sport: Football

High school: Altoona

College: Maryland

Hall of Fame achievement: Two-year starter, three-year letterman (1978-80) as Maryland defensive end

Current residence: Severna Park, Md.

by today's standards.

The Terps went 9-3, 7-4 and 8-4 during Todd's time and he appeared in two bowl games — the Sun and Citrus. He was signed by the Jets as a free agent, but did not appear in any exhibition games before being released.

"College was a blast," Benson said. "I enjoyed football and everything about it. I loved defense, the crowds, the traveling and the competition. I still miss the competition, so I golf now."

Todd remained in the Maryland area, and he currently operates his own office copier rental products business in Severna Park, near Annapolis. He married his wife, Pam, who is from Montgomery County, three years ago. He has three stepchildren. His parents, Bill and Joanne, still live in the Altoona area, and Todd returns often.

"Altoona is fantastic," he said. "I couldn't think of a better place to grow up. I get back home about once a month. I still love it. It's beautiful country and you don't appreciate it until you leave."



All four Benson brothers — (from left) Troy, Shawn, Todd and Brad — earned Division I football scholarships.

Besides brothers Brad and Troy, Todd's great uncle, legendary track coach Dick Bartholomew, is also a member of the Blair County Sports Hall

of Fame, class of 1990.

"It's a real honor for me and my family," Todd said of his selection. "I'm thrilled and really looking forward to it."

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