



Maurice 'Babe' Patt was a learned man, staying at Carnegie Tech to complete his degree before going to the National Football League.

Patt dared to be great, and was

By Neil Rudel

Maurice Patt was 6-foot-2 and one of the bigger kids on the block while growing up in the Garfield area of Altoona. And yet, the man who went on to achieve lofty athletic heights at Altoona High School, Carnegie Tech and the National Football League was known throughout his abbreviated life as Babe.

"He had a couple older brothers," said his son, Paris. "He was the baby for a while and that's how he got the nickname."

"It was one of those things," older brother Lou said. "Maybe he was crying one day . . . but everybody called him Babe, from five or six years old. It stuck with him up until the time he died. Nobody knew him by his right name."

Nonetheless, Babe Patt certainly represents a piece of the rich sports history in Altoona and Blair County.

Patt was part of a great era of athletics at Altoona Area High School in the early 1930s. He played key roles on the football team and basketball team, both of which advanced to the respective state championship games. The football team, during

his junior year, lost to John Harris 13-7 in 1931 and the previously-unbeaten basketball team lost to Lower Merion 21-16 in 1933.

"Babe was an outstanding athlete in both of his sports," said Harry Dinges, former teammate in football. "Of course, he was one of the bigger guys. Babe was a good competitor and he had a lot of natural ability."

From Altoona High, where he competed under Snaps Emanuel, Babe had his choice of schools and wound up selecting Carnegie Tech with the idea of earning a degree in architecture.

At Carnegie Tech, Patt played football and basketball, and earned considerable distinction in both sports. He was part of a team that beat Notre Dame during his senior year, 1937, and he played in the East-West Shrine game. Patt was an end and a quarterback and, in both positions, took advantage of his unusually large hands.

"That's what made him such a good receiver," said former opponent Steve

Petro of Pitt, "and that's why he was such a good basketball player."

But Petro, a Windber native and a member of the Cambria County Sports Hall of Fame, said Patt had a thirst to be unique.

"Babe was a daring type," said Petro, now a volunteer assistant coach at Pitt. "If somebody said it couldn't be done, he'd try to disprove that. He didn't think there was anything he couldn't do, which is what made him so great."

Another former Pitt great Patt played against was Marshall Goldberg, who led the Panthers to the national championship in 1937.

"I remember him very distinctly," Goldberg said from Chicago, where he owns a machine company. "They had an outstanding team and even though we were national champions, we had a real tough time with them. Babe was a tall, lanky guy who was really good on defense."

Goldberg and Patt were outstanding Jewish athletes. Patt will be inducted into
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the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Hall of Fame later this year.

"I knew him personally," Goldberg said. "We ran into each other through the years and were on friendly terms. He was a nice man."

Instead of going into pro football after his senior season, Patt wanted instead to finish his degree. While he did, he helped coach Carnegie Tech in 1938.

He also made his mark as a basketball player and was named to Pittsburgh's all-city team along with being named the captain of an all-Pennsylvania team that included Frank Barnett (Penn), Walter Miller (Duquesne), Matt Goukas (St. Joseph's) and Tom Hurley (Geneva). Patt was not known as a prolific scorer, but, as a guard, made his mark by playing hard, rebounding, lending leadership to the team. So wrote Lester Biederman of the Pittsburgh Press after 3,000 saw Carnegie Tech defeat Duquesne 38-33.

"Babe Patt was the genuine hero of the combat, and though the Altoona ace failed to score from the field, his four fouls in as many attempts, plus his heady floor work and general all-around effectiveness had as much to do with Duquesne's downfall as anything. For competitive spirit, this Patt can't be matched."

Patt went on to play professional football in 1938, going to the Detroit Lions. However, he stayed there only one year, following Coach Dutch Clark to Cleveland. Clark took several of his favorite players with him to the Rams and Patt played there for four seasons before serving in the Navy.

One of Patt's teammates in Cleveland was Fred Gehrke, who went on to become the general manager of the Denver Broncos.

"He was a leader and I was a rookie," Gehrke recalled. "I remember him being a big help to me. He always told me to hang in there and that I would be all right and he would do that almost every day. He told me not to let the big names scare me."

At that time, pro football was comprised of only 12 teams.

"You had to be a pretty good player to make a team in those days," Gehrke said. "I remember him being a steady, good performer."

After World War II, Patt almost broke into the movie industry. He was friendly with Bob Waterfield, the former Cleveland quarterback. Waterfield, in turn, was even more friendly with actress Jane Russell. One thing led to another and Patt had a screen test for a Tarzan picture.

"He didn't make it," Paris said, "evidently because he never learned to swim. He was a tremendous athlete, but I guess he was always too busy playing ball. The only reason he made the Navy is he took



After five years of pro football, Babe served in the Navy.

a running dive and did the dead man's float across the pool to make it."

Patt, who shared a tent with Richard Nixon on the Solomon Islands, returned to Altoona after the war because his father, Herman, was ill. Patt then hooked up with Petro to coach the Altoona Mountaineers, then a semi-pro football team, in 1946 and '47.

"He was well versed in the fundamentals, and he was very good with people," Petro said.

Patt entered the wholesale produce business, where he worked until his untimely heart-attack death in 1961. He was 46. Patt's death sent shock waves through Western Pennsylvania.

"When I heard Babe died of a heart

attack, I was stunned," former Carnegie Tech football coach Mel Cratsley told then Altoona Mirror Sports Editor Herb Werner, "because I always pictured Babe as being indestructible."

Patt was survived by wife Dorothy Clark, who passed away two years ago, and three children: Paris (40), Pamela Fincham (44) and Shelley Payson (32). Paris will accept the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame award for his father.

"I think he would be very proud," Paris said. "He would have been a real staunch supporter of high school and college sports. He was shy about his exploits, and he didn't like an awful lot written about him. But he would have been very pleased to be remembered."