

INDUCTEE PROFILE

Fearless competitor

Love of football drove Geishausser at BG, WVU

By Josh Langenbacher
Altoona Mirror

As a young kid growing up merely yards away from Prospect Park, Thom Geishausser would spend his summer days watching Altoona Area High School and what was then Altoona Catholic High School's football squads march through conditioning drills, fetching water for the players he grew up idolizing.

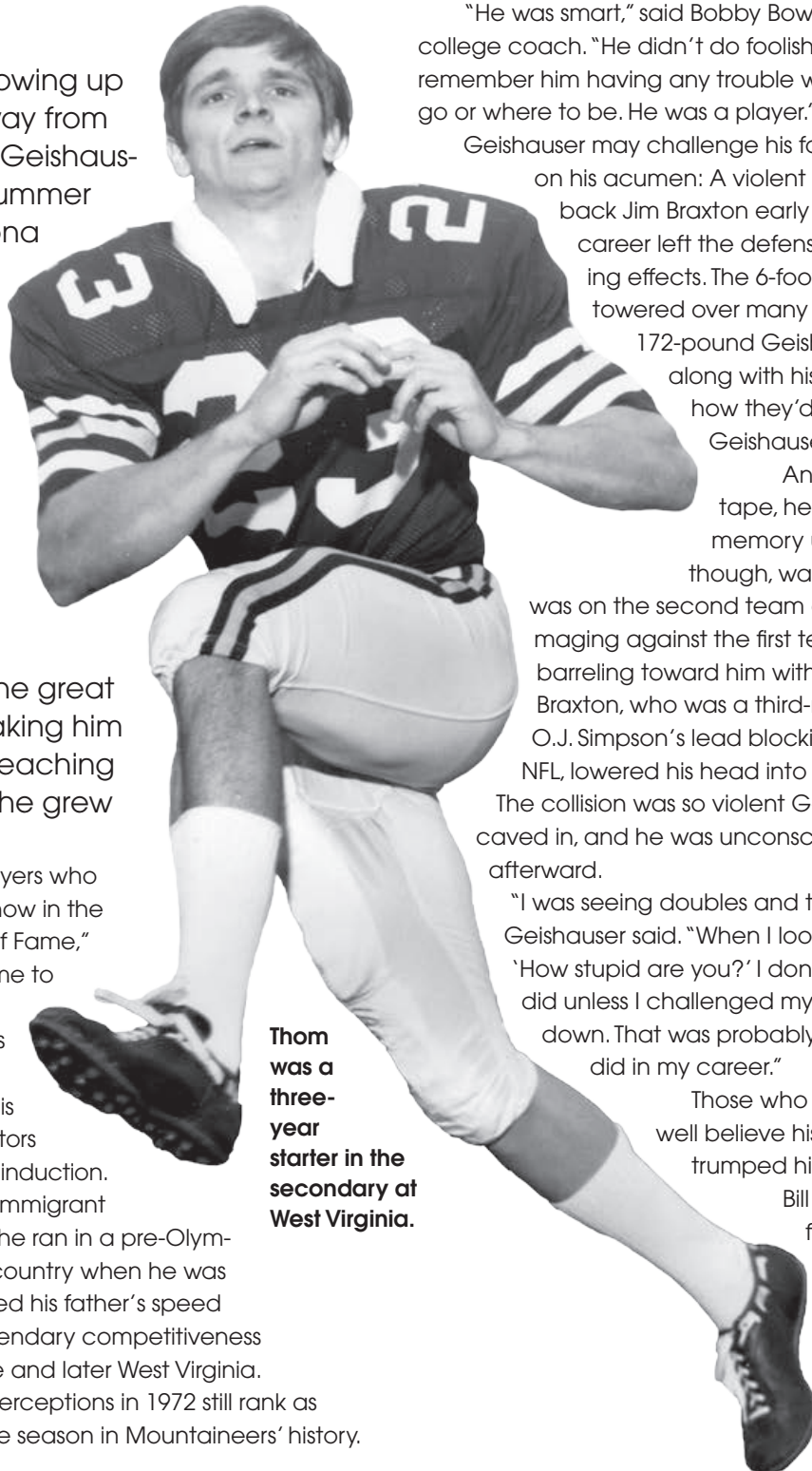
Geishausser's constant presence, he said, culminated in the great players of that era taking him under his wing and teaching him about the sport he grew up loving.

"So many of those players who played in those days are now in the (Blair County Sports) Hall of Fame," Geishausser said, "and for me to have the occasion to rub elbows with them, that was phenomenal."

Geishausser now joins his boyhood idols turned mentors in the Hall of Fame with his induction.

The son of a German immigrant whose speed was so elite he ran in a pre-Olympic qualifier for his native country when he was only 15, Geishausser inherited his father's speed and meshed that with legendary competitiveness to shine at Bishop Guilfoyle and later West Virginia.

Geishausser's seven interceptions in 1972 still rank as the second most in a single season in Mountaineers' history.



Thom was a three-year starter in the secondary at West Virginia.

"He was smart," said Bobby Bowden, Geishausser's college coach. "He didn't do foolish things. Tommy, I never remember him having any trouble with knowing where to go or where to be. He was a player."

Geishausser may challenge his former college coach on his acumen: A violent collision with running back Jim Braxton early during Geishausser's career left the defensive back with longlasting effects. The 6-foot-1, 245-pound Braxton towered over many of his peers, and the 172-pound Geishausser wondered aloud along with his fellow underclassmen how they'd bring him down.

Geishausser got the chance.

And after seeing it on tape, he won't forget it. His memory until seeing it on tape, though, was fuzzy. Geishausser, who was on the second team at the time, was scrimmaging against the first team, and Braxton came barreling toward him with a full head of steam. Braxton, who was a third-round draft pick and O.J. Simpson's lead blocking back for years in the NFL, lowered his head into Geishausser's face.

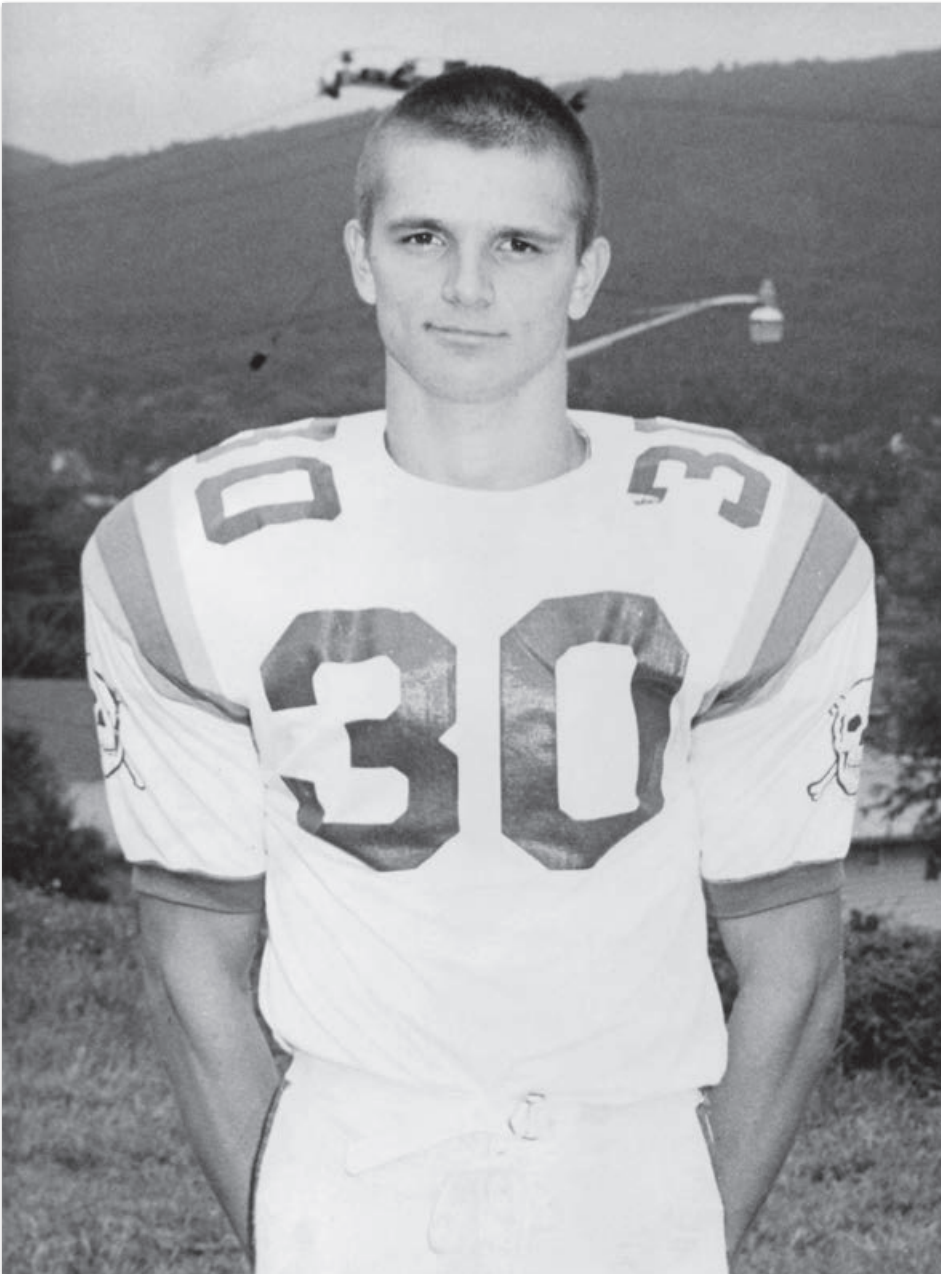
The collision was so violent Geishausser's helmet caved in, and he was unconscious for about two hours afterward.

"I was seeing doubles and triples for eight weeks," Geishausser said. "When I looked on tape, I said, 'How stupid are you?' I don't know why I did what I did unless I challenged myself to try taking this guy down. That was probably the stupidest thing I did in my career."

Those who know Geishausser well believe his competitive streak trumped his sensibility.

Bill Edevane, a lifelong friend and a teammate from Little League through the Kelley Federation, said Geishausser's competitive streak was

(Continued on page 16)



Thom was a high school All-American at Bishop Guilfoyle.

That determination, Geishauser said, started in childhood when he vowed to work himself so hard he'd someday get a college scholarship. And while Geishauser ultimately committed to Bowden and the Mountaineers over numerous offers, that wasn't his first time through the recruitment process.

In 1965, Geishauser found himself torn between attending Altoona Area High School, a national power at the time, and Bishop Guilfoyle, where most of Geishauser's friends were playing and where athletic director John Riley maintained a strong influence on Geishauser.

During conditioning camps that summer at Prospect Park, the late Dean Rossi, then the head football coach at Roosevelt Junior High School, and Riley took notice of Geishauser, and each made their pitch.

"Dean Rossi had the uniform and everything," Riley said. "I was the athletic director at BG at the time, and I was going around and making sure all the good kids went to play ball at Guilfoyle. I told him, 'Tommy, you're going to Guilfoyle. I don't care what you do with the uniform, throw it away or whatever, but you're going to Guilfoyle.' Rossi didn't like me ever since then."

"Mr. Riley showing the faith in me really helped me a lot," Geishauser said. "If it wasn't for him believing

(Continued from page 15)

unrivaled. During one game, Edevane threw Geishauser a pitch he had been working on, and Geishauser crushed the pitch out of Prospect Park.

"Needless to say," Edevane said, "I didn't work on that pitch anymore." As Geishauser was emerging as a football standout at BG, Scholastic Magazine named him one of the top 100 players in the country in 1968.

"He was somebody who was driven," said Tom Irwin, his high school football coach. "Whether it was bas-

ketball, baseball or football, he stood out in football, but competition came to him through motivation. There was something driving him to where he wanted to succeed. He had college in mind, and he had the pros in mind."



Geishauser bio

Sport: Football

High school: Bishop Guilfoyle Catholic

College: West Virginia

Hall of Fame achievement: Broke into WVU starting lineup as a sophomore cornerback and became a three-year starter. His seven interceptions as a senior (1972) ranked eighth in the country and remain second-highest single-season total in Mountaineer history.

Current residence: Altoona

in me, I'd probably still be running around Prospect Park somewhere." Instead, Geishauser ran around at Bishop Guilfoyle, where his accomplishments including helping spring an upset of DeMatha Catholic that many consider the biggest win in school history until the Marauders' 2014 state title.

That prowess led to what Geishauser, known as the "Golden Goose" in high school for his ability to rally his peers, called his proudest accomplishment: earning a full college scholarship.

He chose West Virginia, in part because of its proximity, over offers from Notre Dame, Alabama, Villanova, Dayton, Xavier, Arizona State, Colorado State and Illinois.

"Coming from an average family where my parents had to work every day to provide for my family, for me to earn a full athletic scholarship and being able to tell my mom and dad you don't have to worry about paying for college was my way of saying thank you to my parents," he said.

Following his playing days at



Thom and his two sons — Cory (middle) and Bret.

West Virginia, Geishauser had two NFL tryouts, one with the Redskins under George Allen and one with the Giants. His first was with the Redskins the spring after his senior season, and he was one of 600 in camp. He made it to the final 10 but didn't make the team.

His second tryout was with the Giants, and he made the team but

tore both hamstrings his first day in camp. The NFL required teams to keep injured players on the roster, but he asked for his release.

"I could hardly move," he said. "I had a family. A teaching/coaching position opened at Bishop Guilfoyle, so I decided to forego any hope I'd get healthy sooner rather than later."