

INDUCTEE PROFILE

# Determination fueled Turchetta

## Became 'ultimate offensive lineman' at Miami

By Neil Rudel  
*Altoona Mirror*

Almost every athlete with big dreams can identify a turning point in their life that served as a springboard to the success they eventually achieved.

For Tom Turchetta, that came when he was struggling at Shippensburg University, both physically and in the classroom, and he transferred to Taft Junior College in California, one of the nation's top JUCOs for producing Division I talent.

Several Altoona players had gone to Taft, such as Greg Campbell, Phil Witherspoon, and Bill Kitt, and "they told the Taft coaches about me, and that's where I went."

He righted himself academically and began flourishing on the field – in part because of his work ethic and belief in himself. He earned JUCO All-American honors and won a scholarship to the University of Miami, where he became the Hurricanes' team captain.

Turchetta's confidence came from his roots.

"When I went out there, I made up my mind, I was going to play Division I football, and no one was going to convince me that I couldn't," he said. "There may have been more talented and bigger people, (but) I just made up my mind that if you're going to beat me, you better pack a lunch because I was going to be there all day. And I learned that in Altoona."

"Tom's stubborn and tough," close friend and former Bishop Guilfoyle High School teammate Jim Georgiana said. "He set goals, and that's the way it was going to be. He had toughness and the will to win."

A 1967 graduate of BG – he was also a key member of the Marauders' 1967 basketball team that won the Pennsylvania Catholic Interscholastic Athletic Association title and was inducted in the Hall of Fame in 2014 – Turchetta was mentored by the likes of BG coach Al Pacifico, a

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Tom went from Taft Junior College in California — where he was a JUCO All-American — to the University of Miami, where he became a two-year starter and team captain.



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family friend, and Bill Gaffey along with Altoona assistant coaches Ron Rickens and Dean Rossi.

“I grew up when Altoona was at the height of high school athletics,” he said. “It was unbelievable. All we wanted to do was play. Whatever sport was in season, we’d go from football to basketball to baseball.”

During the 1960s, both Altoona and BG football programs were cloning Division I players, especially in football.

“We probably didn’t have all the great athletes that Altoona had, but we had our share,” Turchetta said. “Al and Bill Gaffey were so influential in our lives. Earl Strohm was averaging eight wins a year at Altoona and Ron Rickens was there ... some of the great names in Altoona sports history. Al was building it at BG, and then Tommy Irwin came in. We were exposed to the legacy of sports in Altoona and all the great athletes who came before us.”

After his second year at Taft, Miami was looking for a center and offered Turchetta, who made his mark at the “U” in 1970 and ’71. A two-year starter, he played center as a junior and guard as a senior and was later named to the school’s all-decade team.

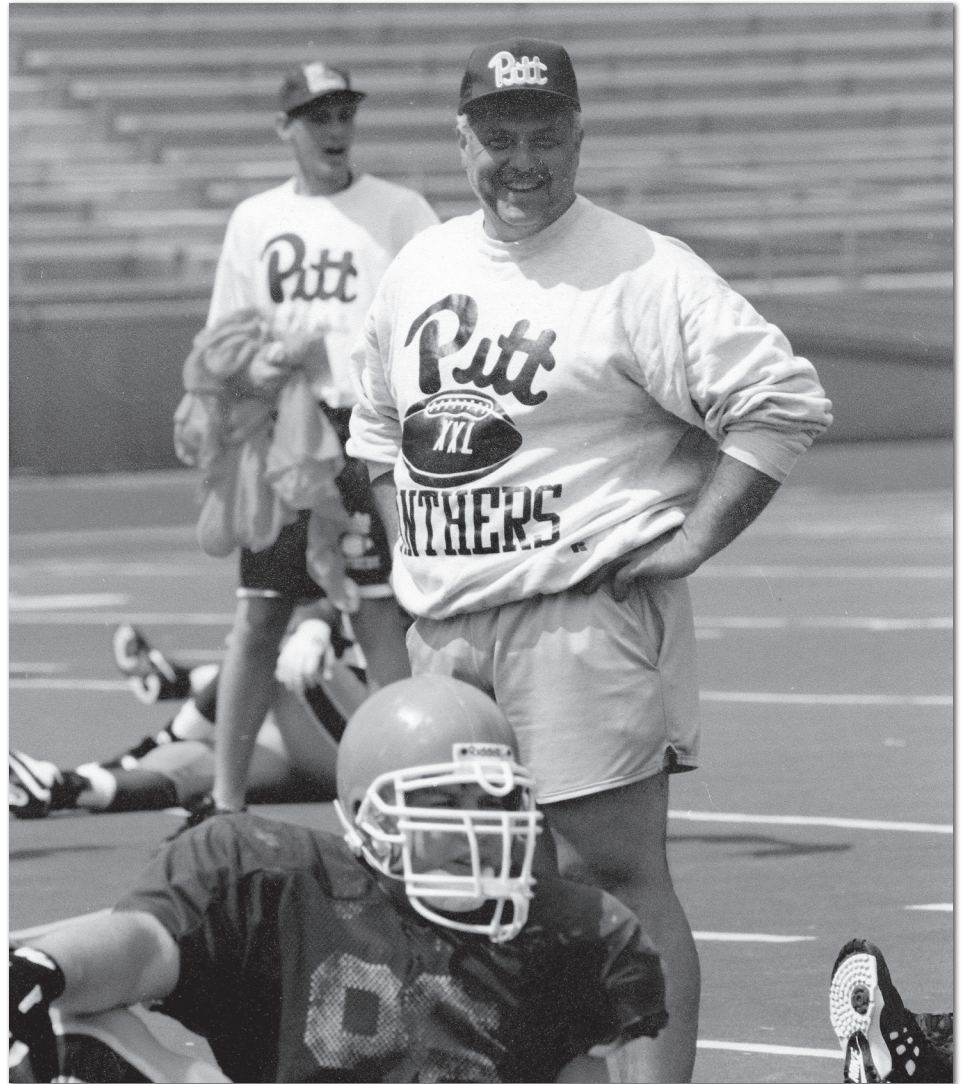
Former Wake Forest player Vince Nedimyer (HOF class of 2018) grew up with Turchetta and was a high school teammate of Turchetta’s brother, Bill, who played at Villanova.

Nedimyer was on Wake’s staff as a graduate assistant when Miami beat the Demon Deacons in ’71.

“Tom was an ultimate offensive lineman,” Nedimyer, who is serving as Turchetta’s HOF presenter, said. “He was so fundamentally sound, and his footwork was outstanding. He was strong as a bull, and he could run. They did a lot of pulling and trapping, and he got out ... he blocked for Chuck Foreman, who went to the NFL. He was always leading him.”

When Turchetta arrived, top stars Ted Hendricks and Tony Cline had departed, and the ’Canes were struggling against a mighty independent schedule, going 3-8 and 4-7 in his two seasons.

But he took a measure of pride in the character shown after a 56-14 blowout in the snow at Syracuse – “at halftime, we had to beg the South Florida guys on the team to go back out there, it was so bad,” he said – by bouncing back the next week



Tom spent 30 years in college coaching, including a five-year stint at Pitt.

and winning at Florida, 14-13.

Not long after, Howard Schnellenberger was hired and established what is now known as “The U.”

“I have a lot of pride in them,” Turchetta said, adding with a smile. “The better they are, the better player I’ve become.”

Turchetta played in the North-South Shrine game, but declined a tryout with the Chicago Bears in part to start his coaching career, which began in high school in the Miami area.

He became a coaching lifer,

spending stints at Kentucky, East Tennessee State, Kentucky State, Temple, Memphis, University of Texas-El Paso, Pitt and Wyoming.

He worked under the likes of Fran Curci



## Turchetta bio

**Sport:** Football

**High school:** Bishop Guilfoyle

**College:** University of Miami

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Was two-year starting guard at Miami (1970-71) co-captaining the team his senior year in ’71. Prior to Miami, attended Taft (Calif.) Junior College and earned JUCO All-American honors. Spent more than 30 years in coaching at the college level, including five years as an assistant at Pitt.

at Kentucky, Bruce Arians at Temple and Johnny Majors during the latter's second tour at Pitt.

While at Memphis, in 1987-88, the Tigers (with Charlie Bailey as the head coach) scored wins over Alabama and Florida, both ranked in the Top 20.

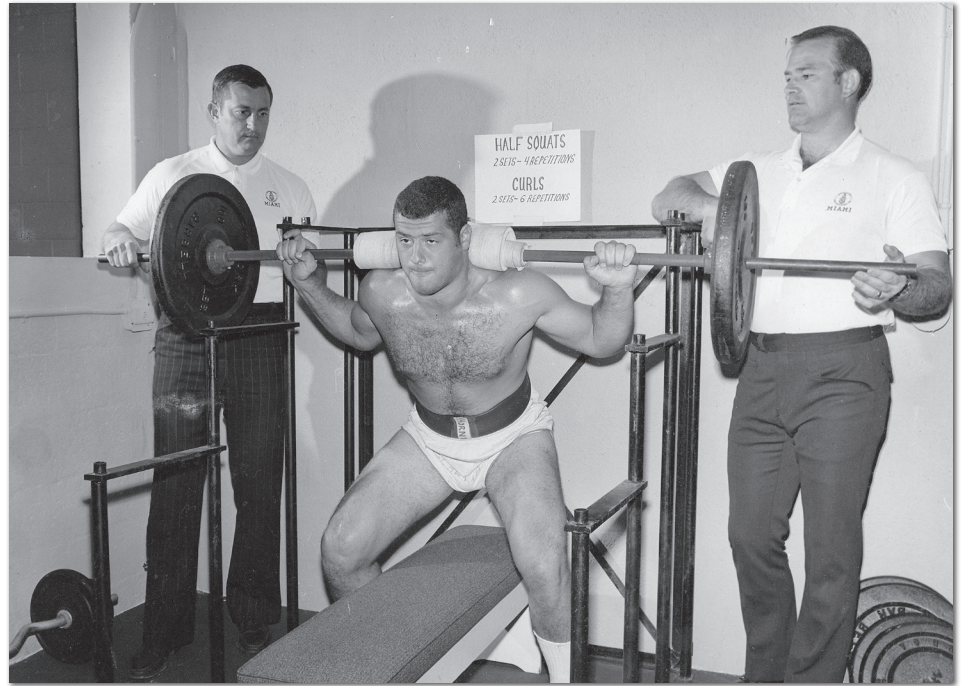
"When you beat an SEC school, it was a big deal," Turchetta said. "We had some really good wins at Memphis."

He appreciated joining the Pitt staff under Paul Hackett as it gave him an opportunity to be closer to home.

"In college coaching, you're all over the place, and I was there five years, and that was the longest I had ever been at one place. I was averaging a move every two years," Turchetta said. "I was able to see my parents (Tony and Sylvia) more in four-five years than I did for 20 years."

Current Tampa Bay Buccaneers' assistant coach Nick Rapone was a fellow Pitt staff member who holds Turchetta in high regard.

"There's nobody I think more of," Rapone said. "I coached with Tom at three different schools -- East Tennessee State, Temple and Pitt. He baptized my third child. That tells you my respect for him. He was a very meticulous, tough coach. He demanded a lot from his players, and he gave his players everything he had. His players loved him -- and he was a great recruiter. People also don't realize how good a football player he was -- and then



Tom didn't mind showing off his physique in the Miami weight room.

that transcended into coaching."

"He's a very special guy," Georgiana said.

Turchetta, who resides with his wife, Rita, in Tennessee, considers himself "very fortunate" to have spent his life in football.

"I've met some of the greatest people -- some of the biggest names in coaching," he said.

His hometown Hall of Fame recognition has brought his life full circle.

"It's very humbling and very rewarding,"

Turchetta said. "I could not have a higher opinion of the athletic history of our city and our region ... During my coaching days, every time you would mention Altoona, the eyebrows would raise and people would acknowledge the outstanding athletics background and to be part of that background and history is humbling and beyond words. I couldn't be more proud and more humbled at the same time. This is a tremendous honor, and something that I'll cherish for the rest of my years."

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