

# BEARS

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## College and pro players and coaches flock to Halas Hall

By: Larry Mayer | Last Updated: 2/23/2009 6:38 PM

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LAKE FOREST, Ill. – Professional and college football luminaries gathered at Halas Hall Monday for an awards ceremony hosted by the Chicago chapter of the National Football Foundation.

Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald was honored for his induction into the College Football Hall of Fame, recently retired Purdue coach Joe Tiller received the NFF Distinguished American Award and Northern Illinois coach Jerry Kill was presented with the NFF Courage Award.

Among those who attended were Bears quarterback Kyle Orton; former Bears Gary Fencik, Jimbo Covert, Emery Moorehead, Brian Baschnagel, Glen Kozlowski and Bobby Douglass; former Notre Dame safety Tom Zbikowski, who just completed his rookie season with the Baltimore Ravens; former Purdue wide receiver Taylor Stubblefield; and 1953 Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Lattner.

Bears Care and the NFF both donated \$10,000 in college scholarships for Chicago area high school seniors who have excelled on the field, in the classroom and in the community. The six scholarship recipients honored Monday were Jacob Cooke (Bradley-Bourbonnais), Damone Flowers (South Shore), Martin Hopkins (St. Rita), Mark Kachmer (St. Francis), Matthew Purdom (Immaculate Conception) and Bryan Whitson (Mundelein).

Bears CEO and president Ted Phillips was the keynote speaker at Monday's event, with radio play-by-play announcer Jeff Joniak serving as Master of Ceremonies.

### In Kyle's corner

Having coached Orton at Purdue, Tiller has closely monitored the quarterback's development since he joined the Bears as a fourth-round draft pick in 2005. Orton concluded his college career ranked third on the Boilermakers' all-time passing list with 9,337 yards and 63 touchdowns.

"I think he's more patient today than he used to be," Tiller said. "He's obviously maturing at the position and he's a different player than he was when he first showed up [in Chicago]."

"He's always been a strong-armed guy. He's a talented guy. He doesn't lack confidence in his own ability, which is a positive. He's grown in his understanding of the game and he continues to mature, and I think he'll be a better quarterback next year than he was last year."

Orton performed exceptionally well during the first half of the 2008 season, but struggled at times upon returning from a sprained right ankle after missing only one start.

"Knowing the kind of guy he is and how competitive he is, I think it bothered him more than he let anybody know," Tiller said. "We had a problem with him at Purdue. I remember one time he had a cracked rib and wouldn't tell us about it. Some of those guys have so much pride, they won't want to expose anything."

### Backing Brett

Fitzgerald was happy to see the Bears sign former Northwestern quarterback Brett Basanez earlier this month. The 2005 Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year broke 32 school records including career passing yards, total offense, completions and passing touchdowns.

"No. 1, Brett's a competitor," Fitzgerald said. "You think back to his career at Northwestern and all the records that he set there. He



**Bears quarterback Kyle Orton reunited with former Purdue coach Joe Tiller and ex-Boilermakers receiver Taylor Stubblefield Monday at Halas Hall.**

developed into one outstanding quarterback on the field. But I think what separates Brett from a lot of people is what he's able to do off the field.

"He's a great student of the game. He understands offensive football very well. I know there are a lot of guys who work diligently in the Bears organization, but he'll rival any of the great workers from a behind-the-scenes standpoint.

"He's got a personality that guys just seem to gravitate towards. He's a great leader off the field. I know he'll be excited about the opportunity to compete for playing time, and I think where that's going to is where it'll go. I don't think he comes in with any preconceived notions."

#### History lesson

Lattner brought the Heisman Trophy he won 56 years ago with him to Monday's event. The 76-year-old played one NFL season with the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1954 before joining the Air Force. A knee injury prevented him from returning to the league.

Lattner grew up on Chicago's west side and has been a lifelong Bears fan.

"I think the nucleus they've got now is pretty good," he said. "They need a couple of long receivers, and if they spread the field out a little bit I think with the backs they've got I'm pretty sure they'll be able to be competitive."

#### Local boy makes good

A Chicago area native who attended Buffalo Grove High School, Zbikowski would have liked to have been selected by the Bears in last year's draft. But he ended up being chosen by the Ravens in the third round, and he helped Baltimore reach the AFC title game.

"[Former Bears defensive backs coach] Steve Wilks was my defensive backs coach at Notre Dame for a year, so it would have been nice to get back with him and stay home and play here," Zbikowski said. "But I can't complain. I ended up in the AFC Championship, and I ended up with [defensive coordinator] Rex Ryan and playing with guys like Ed [Reed] and Ray [Lewis]."

Zbikowski is looking forward to facing the Bears next season in Baltimore.

"I was hoping the game was at home [in Chicago] and I'd have a little section of purple in Soldier Field," he said. "But it'll be fun. I watched [Brian] Urlacher and Lance Briggs all through high school and when I was in college. To line up and play against them should be fun. I might have to bring a little extra to the table."

#### Home boy

Fencik has watched several former teammates he played with on the Bears defense become NFL coaches. The list includes Mike Singletary, Jeff Fisher, Leslie Frazier, Ron Rivera, Doug Plank and Al Harris. Fencik never had the desire to coach, but he once did inquire about another job.

"I talked to Jim Finks shortly after I got out of football, but I wasn't really interested in coaching as much as being more on the management side," Fencik said. "Jim was very encouraging. At the time, he was the president of the New Orleans Saints.

"He said if I was willing to make the commitment to two different cities over 'X' amount of years ... and that kind of ended the discussion because I wasn't leaving Chicago.

"In terms of coaching, my dad was a basketball coach and I don't think people really appreciate the commitment. If you look at any of the coaches in this building or in the NFL, it's like a military life—two years here and three years there. I'm an anomaly. I've stayed in one city my entire adult life and don't plan on that changing."

#### Roster news

Exclusive rights free agents Nick Roach and Marcus Hamilton have been tendered contracts by the Bears. Roach, who replaced Hunter Hillenmeyer as starting strongside linebacker at the midpoint of the season, registered 40 tackles while appearing in 14 games with nine starts.

Hamilton recorded two tackles on defense and four on special teams in eight games as a reserve cornerback after being claimed by the Bears off waivers from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Sept. 23.



Former Notre Dame star Johnny Lattner brought the 1953 Heisman Trophy to Halas Hall Monday.