
Honoring and Preserving the Sports History of Chautauqua County



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

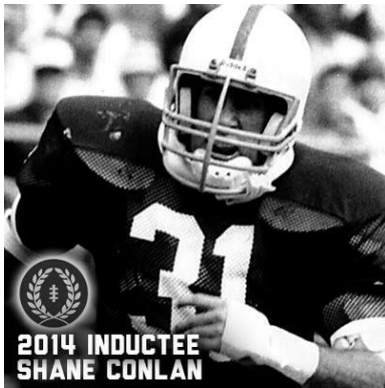
15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

January 2015

2015 CSHOF BANQUET SPEAKER

Shane Conlan

Shane Conlan, superstar linebacker of Frewsburg Central School, Penn State, the Buffalo Bills and the Los Angeles Rams, will be the featured speaker at the 34th Annual Induction Banquet of the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame on February 16 at the Lakewood Rod & Gun Club.



“We are excited to have Shane as the guest speaker for our induction dinner,” said Randy Anderson, CSHOF president. “Shane has always been one of our most decorated honorees,” stated Anderson about the 1992 CSHOF inductee, All-American and NFL Pro-Bowler, “but two recent honors have really been the icing on the Conlan cake. In addition to being inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in December, Shane was also voted to the ‘Mount Rushmore of Penn State.’ That means in the long and storied history of the Penn State football team, Conlan is considered one of the four best players to ever don the blue and white uniform of the Nittany Lions. His appearance will add a special touch to the induction

of **Jehuu Caulcrick, Chuck Crist, Bill Davenport, Jack Keeney, Scrubby Olson, Vincent Powers, Ramsay Riddell, Jim Roselle, Dan Stimson and Mel Swanson.**”

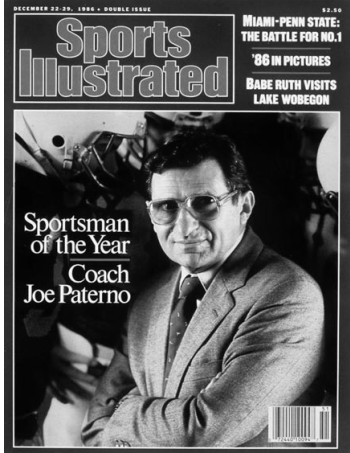
WHAM, BAM, SUPER SAM

Penn State's Shane Conlan, a quiet fellow known to his teammates as Super Sam, is the latest -- some say the greatest -- linebacker turned out by Linebacker U

By Craig Neff, Sports Illustrated, December 22, 1986

Welcome, students of psychology. Today, another linebacker. Violent. Lives, breathes football. Derives most pleasure from, ahem, "just really laying into somebody." What's that? There's a bolt rattling around in your Corvette? Sorry, we covered (Brian) Bosworth last semester.

Now then. There are two Shane Conlans to discuss here. Two? That's right. The off-the-field Conlan -- affectionately known to his Penn State teammates as Jughead -- is 6 ft. 3 in., 225 pounds of jawline, warm heart and aw-shucks grins. He is college football's official square knot. Earns good grades, too -- he's really no Jughead at all. Most emphatically, he's no Boz. That's like linebackanalina versus linebackalaureate. The out-of-uniform Conlan is a small-town boy who loves Springsteen and uses expressions such as "really nice" and "so great." He has no jewelry hanging from his ears. Beneath that Beaver Cleaver haircut, however, lurks a second Shane Conlan, an impatient, hyper-aggressive one known to his teammates as Super Sam. Super Sam is nearly as mad as Boz. He emerges when the 22-year-old Conlan, a fifth-year senior, takes the field at outside ("Sam") linebacker. "Sometimes I lose my mind out there," admits Conlan.



This Conlan is a two-time All-America with 4.55 speed, a 34-inch vertical leap and no off switch. He may be the best linebacker the Nittany Lions have ever put on the field. "We've never asked a linebacker to do as many things as we've asked him to do," says Penn State coach Joe Paterno. "We play him inside, we play him outside, we use him on pass defense. He's the same kind of athlete Jack Ham was -- intelligent, intense, consistent."

"He's better than I was," says Ham, the ex-Steeler turned businessman and TV commentator.

Conlan is a defensive swashbuckler, roaming the gridiron with his uniform jersey knotted in back, kerchief-style. "I like the feeling of it being tight, not all loose and flapping around," he says of his shirt. "If it isn't tight enough it drives me nuts."

Conlan's sleeves are tied up too, transforming his arms into displays of straining biceps. "You know, into guns," he says. Pow-pow-pow! Conlan's 274 career tackles rank him second, with John Skorupan, in Penn State history behind Greg Buttle (343). "There's nothing I hate more than missing a tackle," he says. "It's like popping up in baseball. I can't stand it."

Penn State has installed several defenses just to take advantage of Conlan's abilities. Most frequently used is the Bubble, which was introduced in last January's 25-10 Orange Bowl loss to Oklahoma. To put it in simple terms, Conlan is the bubble. Sometimes he floats along, following the ball; other times he attaches himself to a particular back the entire game. The bubble defense never looks the same, but it usually works. Against Oklahoma, Conlan isolated on Sooner quarterback Jamelle Holieway and held him to one yard on 12 carries. Holieway had been averaging almost 100 yards rushing per game. "I thought I played pretty well," says Conlan, who also had six tackles and a fumble recovery, "but it didn't matter because we lost."

There seems little doubt that next year Conlan will become the 24th Joe Paterno-coached Penn State linebacker to step into the NFL. "I think that in all probability he'll be either the second, third or fourth player selected in the draft," says Cowboy vice-president-personnel development Gil Brandt. "I don't see any weaknesses there. He's a competitor, he's got the size and speed that you look for and he's got the athletic ability that you want in a linebacker."

"I believe there's a can't-miss category for him," says Reed Johnson, the Broncos' director of player personnel.

Conlan may well be John Madden's dream player: pure football in a no-frills can. He's the kind of guy who can't wait to get out of the locker room. "I hate warmups, all that pregame stuff," Conlan says. "And I really hate night games, sitting around the hotel all day. Drives me nuts."

Except for his administration of justice studies -- he has a 3.0 GPA and will receive his degree next month -- and regular trips to the movies with his girlfriend, Penn State senior Caroline Wesel, Conlan suffers no distractions during the season. His room is a Mount Nittany of dirty laundry. He drives around campus in

his dad's old boat of a Chrysler, which apparently hasn't been washed and waxed since before preseason camp. "It's called a Magnum," Conlan says. "I like that name -- isn't it great? Magnum."

Not surprisingly, Conlan is an avid Raiders fan. "I call them the death team," he says. "I love the way they play defense, especially Matt Millen. They just fly to the ball. They're a bunch of crazies, man."

Conlan looks a bit crazed himself when he takes the field. For one thing, one of his front teeth is missing. It came out in a high school game a few years back. Conlan leaves his upper plate in the locker room with his other collegiate essentials: textbooks and permanently untied Reebok tennies.

The cost of football has not been lost on Conlan's parents. "He had beautiful teeth," says Dan Conlan of his son.

"The best teeth of all the kids," adds Kay, Shane's mother, somewhat wistfully.



The Conlans have followed their son's career loyally. They would make the 3 1/2-hour drive to State College from tiny Frewsburg, N.Y. (pop. 1,908), 70 miles from Buffalo, often with daughter Kelly, 26, and son Kevin, 24. Kay and Kelly were forced to miss several of Shane's games when Kevin was punting for Edinboro (Pa.) University and the youngest Conlan child, Michael, now a redshirt freshman linebacker at Rutgers, was playing at Frewsburg Central School. "Whenever any of the boys had a game, one of us always had to go," says Kay. "We were afraid that sometime somebody would get hurt and nobody would be there."

The Conlan household was and is one of discipline and caring. Dan Conlan is an investigator with the New York State Police, his wife a part-time cashier at the only grocery store in Frewsburg. They didn't complain much when the boys broke all the garage-door windows playing basketball in the driveway, or dented the aluminum siding with baseballs and footballs. But the kids had to study hard and come home early if they went out. "People don't believe me when I tell them I never even touched a beer until my sophomore year at Penn State," says Shane. "But it's true. None of my brothers ever drank, and neither did my close friends."

Early on, Shane began showing unusual compassion for those less fortunate than he. During high school he tutored special-education students in reading and math in his free periods. "The kids really looked up to Shane a lot," says his best friend, Jon Treadway, who also was a tutor. "He can be impatient about some things, but he was very patient with those kids. A couple of them became managers for our football and basketball teams and always hung around him. Shane helped them in so many ways."

When Shane was in eighth grade, he watched his brother Kevin, a gifted running back, destroy his left knee in a high school football game. The knee was so horribly torn up -- only one small ligament remained -- that the leg swung loosely from side to side like a pendulum.

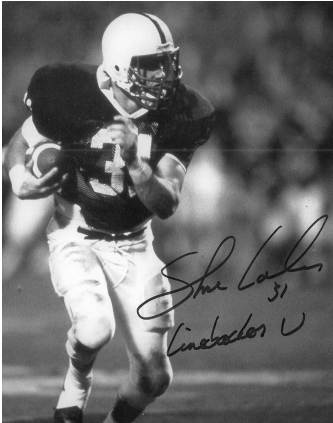
Shane still talks about how his brother worked to come back, how he joined the swim team and lifted weights constantly and was somehow able to punt the next year and eventually play defensive back as a senior. "It was unbelievable," Shane says. "He was such a great athlete. He's probably still a better athlete than I am."

After Kevin's injury Shane became the family's three-sport star. He could dunk in ninth grade and was such a good catcher that, when he was 18, the Pirates brought him to Three Rivers Stadium for a solo tryout and offered him a contract on the spot. In football he kicked off and started at linebacker and tailback, gaining 1,000 yards as a senior. "He just ran over people," says Tom Sharp, the football coach for Frewsburg Central School. "He was head and shoulders above anybody else."

To Conlan's surprise no major schools except Penn State seriously recruited him. His school was too small, and he weighed just 185 pounds. Never mind that from the time Shane was 12 years old he had hit like a sledgehammer. Sharp had to twist the arm of Penn State assistant Tom Bradley to get the Nittany Lions to take a look at Conlan. Bradley finally drove to Frewsburg through a snowstorm, cursing himself all the way, to watch Conlan play basketball.

"I was planning to duck out after the first quarter," Bradley recalls. "But this kid came out slam-dunking and really put on a show. He was all over the court, diving after loose balls. He played basketball the way he plays football -- nonstop and reckless. I knew he was a football player when he fouled out with about six minutes left in the third quarter."

The Pirates' offer was tempting, but Conlan had his heart set on attending Linebacker U. "If every school in the country had offered me a scholarship, I still would have picked Penn State," he says. "I liked the defense. And I loved the uniform and the black shoes." He loved the uniform?



Conlan's doubts about his ability to play Division I football vanished once he put on the pads and started beating up on hulking upperclassmen in preseason camp. "After the first day, Joe said, 'Boy, he's going to be some kind of player,'" recalls Bradley. But overcoming his social reticence was a bigger challenge for Conlan. "Even in high school, when he was the big star, he was too shy to talk to anybody," says Treadway. "He was never really close to anybody except me and his brother Kevin."

After redshirting the Nittany Lions' national championship year - a frustrating season for Conlan, who was beset by constant sprained ankles and regular fistfights with his own offensive linemen in practice - Shane started gaining size and confidence. But, to this day, Conlan has never been bold enough to as much as address his teammates at a meeting.

Two other things Conlan hasn't learned to do are seek favors and complain. He has taken a lesson from his ever-cheerful friend Treadway, who was born with a cleft palate and went through massive facial reconstruction surgery last year. "He had to be in such pain - they had to break his jaw and rewire it - but it never got him down," says Conlan.

"I was up in the hospital in Buffalo, and Shane kept calling," says Treadway. "The day after I got home he drove all the way up from Penn State just so that he could be there. He does things like that."

Conlan still tends to blush and keep his head down when he's greeted by fans after games. "I guess it's embarrassing," he says. "People ask me certain things, you know, like why are you so good or something."

It certainly makes for a dichotomous personality. "Those things I read in the paper, Shane saying he likes to hit people," Kay Conlan says, brow wrinkled.

"Aw, well," his father says, grinning proudly.

"Well, a mother doesn't like to hear that. He doesn't mean it like it sounds."

In truth, he probably does. Conlan came back for his fifth year at Penn State to get his degree, another crack at the national title and, perhaps more than anything else, additional training for the violent world of pro football. "I hate to sound selfish," he says apologetically, "but sometimes you have to do what's best for you."

What's best for the Penn State football team is having Super Sam appear and start knocking heads. Conlan the linebacker smiles. "That's the name of the game," he says. "Just take off and rock 'em."