

All My Heroes Are Dying - Frank Gifford

As I wait patiently for rebirth, the Georgia season opens Saturday September the 5th at 12 Noon in Athens, I was saddened by the news of yet another hero passing, Frank Gifford.

Now, as unamused as I am by the antics of the N.F.L:

Q: Did you guys hear about the NFL player who hits women?

A: No, the other one. No, the other one. No, the other one.

I do remember a time when the professional game still held a hint of being a sport instead of a big tent show. Frank Gifford played a part in two periods of my fond memories of the NFL. During the 50's he played defense and offense for the New York Giants. He was actually inducted into the Hall of Fame at three positions, defensive back, running back, and wide receiver. He was voted Most Valuable Player in 1956, which was a time I would have been running double-reverse Statue of Liberty plays on the schoolyard field and wowing my own contemporaries.

Gifford played in a time when being as tough as a pine knot was expected. For an example of how tough the NFL was back then, and what the human body can endure in the pursuit of being champions, watch the 1967 Super Bowl. Watching the blood freeze on the players rather than clot kind of defines toughness for me. Snot icicles scream a level of imperviousness to pain I can't imagine. Gifford himself returned from a head injury in 1962 that had forced him to retire in 1961. The NFL back then was a far cry from the carpeted, environmentally controlled, ego stroked contests of today.

After Gifford retired he went into sports broadcasting and was part of what would become an institution in the game, Monday Night Football. We all hate Mondays. It means we have to go back to work and start the slog through the days until Saturday and we can watch football again. Now, there was a reason to look forward to Mondays. Not all of the games were winners, but the entertainment was always first rate. Gifford, a California surfer dude doing play by play, Don Meredith, a Texas farm boy offering colorful player insight, and Howard Cosell, a New York lawyer who acted as ringmaster. Some of the games were blowouts, and the action on the field was not compelling. Many was the time that Dandy Don would become bored and start singing or telling stories about Jeff and Hazels' baby boy, and Gifford would reel him back in to concentrate on the matter at hand. When Cosell would go off script to

make a point that he had no personal experience to back up, Gifford would politely correct him and draw attention back to the game. Gifford was the glue that held the group together and that group made Mondays endurable for the masses.

Gifford was not only a hero on the field, in 1986 in an act of profound bravery he took Kathie Lee off of the market. His personal act of "taking one for the team" should be viewed by one and all as the selfless act of a great humanitarian. It is true he had a few acts of indiscretion after his marriage, but even Mulva gave him a pass on those considering his noble act of corralling Kathy Lee.

Goodbye Giff, you'll never be forgotten. Dandy Don used to sing, "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys", but I'm sure he would add you to the list.