



A FOOTBALL LEGACY:
**HALL CELEBRATES
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA AT**
NFL Draft



Professional football was born in Western Pennsylvania. Then, I like to say, that it grew up in Canton, Ohio.

—JON KENDLE—



Mirroring Western Pennsylvania's iconic three rivers, the National Football League's past, present and future converged along the shore of the 2026 NFL Draft as members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame welcomed the NFL's next generation.

As Commissioner Roger Goodell opened the draft to his traditional chorus of "boos," he was joined on stage by Hall of Famers Mel Blount, Lynn Swann and Terry Bradshaw, as well as former Pittsburgh Steelers Ben Roethlisberger and Hines Ward, and current players Cameron Heyward and T.J. Watt.

Draped in Gold Jackets and waving Terrible Towels, Western Pennsylvania's rich history and its rising stars stood side by side in front of a raucous 320,000 first-day attendees.

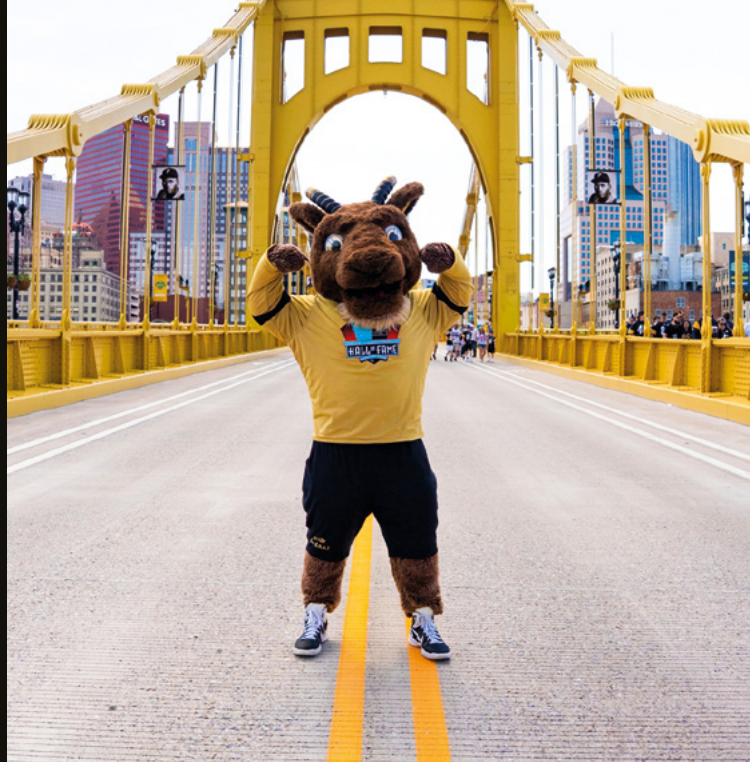
"Standing on the stage and looking out, seeing that skyline," Ward, a Hall of Fame nominee for several years, told Steelers.com.

"The stage is in a great location, and you feel the great history and tradition that all happened right where the NFL Draft is being held."

Over draft weekend, blue-chip talent such as Fernando Mendoza, David Bailey and Jeremiyah Love heard their names called from the stage in Pittsburgh, which hosted its first NFL Draft since 1948. A record 805,000 attendees gathered for the three-day event as 257 prospects began their professional football careers in the heart of Western Pennsylvania.

While the 2026 rookie class began their NFL journey, the Pro Football Hall of Fame celebrated the legacies of Hall of Famers local to the region. The Hall's Museum and Archives Team transported 23 Bronze Busts of Hall of Famers who attended high school in Western Pennsylvania to the Kamin Science Center on the city's North Shore, allowing fans a unique opportunity to see their local greats.

"Professional football was born in Western Pennsylvania," said Jon Kendle the Hall of Fame's vice president of museum and archives. "Then, I like to say, that it grew up in Canton, Ohio."



The Bronze Bust is one of the three iconic symbols, along with the Hall of Fame Gold Jacket created by Haggard and the Kay Jewelers Ring of Excellence, that represent the accomplishments of a Pro Football Hall of Famer.

Fans were elated to see their local heroes represented during draft weekend, including Steelers fan Corey Curenton, who had developed a relationship with Darrelle Revis as a young student at Aliquippa Junior/Senior High School through his mother, a faculty member. Corey and other fans grinned ear to ear as they took pictures with the busts of their favorite players. Fans on the draft's campus also had the opportunity to spin the Hall of Fame's prize wheel, which offered exclusive and coveted prizes.

To begin the third day of the draft, Goodell was joined on stage by more than 100 high school students from local schools that either had a player drafted into the NFL or a player enshrined into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The moment paid "homage to the most iconic football players and

their schools," Goodell said in front of 200,000+ attendees braving the rainy Day 3 conditions.

Other Pro Football Hall of Famers were on-site for this year's draft, including Rondé Barber, who co-hosted the event with a cohort of media personnel. He took the stage on the second day of the draft with Steelers defensive tackle Cameron Heyward to commemorate Hall of Famer and Western Pennsylvania native Art Rooney Sr. for his contributions to professional football.

In 1967, Rooney hired future Hall of Fame contributor Bill Nunn, a sportswriter from the Pittsburgh Courier who specialized in developing the Black College All-America team, as a scout. Rooney, Nunn and others constructed a dominant Steelers roster in the 1970s that included 11 players from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, including Hall of Famers Blount, Donnie Shell and John Stallworth.

The "Steel Curtain" won four Super Bowls from 1975-1980 and played an integral role in expanding Pittsburgh's

blue-collar reputation to the gridiron.

Nine Hall of Famers announced selections at this year's draft: Barber, Jerome Bettis, Jimbo Covert, Tony Dorsett, Calvin Johnson, Curtis Martin, Drew Pearson, Stallworth and Dwight Stephenson.

Western Pennsylvania's legacy and contributions to professional football will continue to be celebrated by the Hall of Fame in the upcoming "Western PA Proud!" exhibit, which will be located just inside the Hall's main entrance later this year. The exhibit will highlight players and teams from the region that shaped professional football and the NFL.

"The 'Western PA Proud!' exhibit, for me," Kendle said, "is about putting the focus on the beginnings, then to the growth to where we are today in professional football and Western Pennsylvania. The Pro Football Hall of Fame is proud to celebrate the remarkable impact Western Pennsylvania has had on the game."