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Johnson, Richt on 2023 College Football Hall ballot

By Joi Palmore MDJ Sports Writer
Jun 7, 2022



Georgia head coach Mark Richt and Georgia Tech head coach Paul Johnson talk before the game at midfield. Photo by Ted Mayer

Paul Johnson and Mark Richt, the former coaches at rivals Georgia Tech and Georgia, were among the nominees revealed for the 2023 College Football Hall of Fame class.

The National Football Foundation announced 80 players and nine coaches considered for induction. Players on the ballot include a group with former ties to football in Georgia — Tony Gonzalez, Garrison Hearst and Warrick Dunn.

Johnson and Richt became eligible for the Hall following a three-year waiting period following their respective retirements.

In 22 seasons as a coach at Georgia Southern, Navy and Georgia Tech, Johnson produced a career record of 189-99. From 2008-18, he led Georgia Tech to a 82-60 record, ranking fourth in wins over the Yellow Jackets' history. His .577 winning percentage ranks fifth in program history.

In his 11 seasons at Tech, Johnson was named Atlantic Coast Conference Coach of the Year three times in 2008, 2009 and 2014. He was also selected as National Coach of the Year in 2008 by CBS Sportsline.

Johnson earned his biggest accolades as coach over five years at Georgia Southern, leading the Eagles to a 62-10 record and two NCAA Division I-AA national championships and five consecutive Southern Conference titles.

Johnson left Georgia Southern for Navy after the 2001 season and went on to lead the Midshipmen to five eight-win seasons, five Commander-in-Chief trophies and five bowl appearances.

Richt ranks first all-time at Georgia with a 74% career winning percentage. He led the Bulldogs to five Southeastern Conference titles with 15 straight bowl games and eight top-10 final national rankings.

After stepping down at Georgia, Richt moved on to his alma mater, Miami. In 2017, he was the Walter Camp Coach of the Year and the Atlantic Coast Conference Coach of the Year after leading the Hurricanes to the ACC championship game.

For players, the primary guidelines for eligibility are earning All-American status and being at least 10 seasons removed from their final college game.

Gonzalez, a former California tight end, was a 1996 first-team All-American and first-team All-Pac-10 selection. He had nine receptions in the 1996 Aloha Bowl, holding the record at Cal for receptions in a bowl game.

Gonzalez was the 13th overall pick by the Kansas City Chiefs in the 1997 NFL draft and spent 12 seasons with the Chiefs before his last five seasons with the Atlanta Falcons. In 2019, he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Hearst, a former Georgia running back, was a 1992 first-team All-American, winner of the Doak Walker Award as the nation's top running back and third in voting for the Heisman Trophy.

Hearst was the third overall pick by the Arizona Cardinals in the 1993 NFL draft. He also played for the Cincinnati Bengals, San Francisco 49ers and Denver Broncos.

Dunn, a former NFL mainstay with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Falcons, was a 1996 first-team All-American and 1995 third-team All-American at Florida State. He led the Seminoles to the 1993 national title.

Dunn is a three-time first-team All-ACC performer who led the league with 8.7 points per game in 1995. He is the only rusher in Florida State history to gain more than 1,000 yards in three consecutive seasons.

The Hall of Fame's induction class will be announced in early 2023.