

A&T star at home again

Continued from page 1C
but injuries have plagued his NFL career. He entered the NFL in 2002 with Cleveland as an undrafted free agent, then was placed on injured reserve with a knee injury. He was picked up by Chicago in 2003, where he started 14 games before breaking a leg. When Mitchell returned to

the lineup, Mitchell was moved inside before being shipped to NFL Europe.

Mitchell said he feels good to be back in the U.S. and back in his home state to play football.

"It's going to cost me a lot more money for tickets to the game, that's for sure," he said.

Mitchell hasn't forgotten the coaches who helped point him toward an NFL career. He speaks regularly with his A&T coach, Bill Hayes, now athletic director at North Carolina Central and just this week talked to his Jacksonville High School coach, Chuck Martin.

Long wait pays for Carson, Wright

Continued from page 1C
performance for the Cowboys. I joined the Cowboys to do one thing - well, to do two things," he said. "One was to help the club win football games, and secondly was to help my family. My performance on the football field was not thought about one day becoming a hall of famer."

Wright, who never played football in high school, went on to play tight end, punter and defensive end at Fort Valley. Dallas drafted him as a tight end in 1967, then switched him to offensive tackle, where he started four of the five Super Bowls he played in.

Carson, a defensive lineman in college, teamed with Lawrence Taylor and Carl Banks to give New York one of the best linebacker combinations in NFL history. He's the third Bulldog to reach the hall, following Marion Motley and Deacon Jones.

"Harry made a transition that was very difficult in professional football," said Dallas Cowboys head coach Bill Parcells, Carson's former coach with the Giants. "He was a small college player, he never played on his

feet in college, he was a defensive lineman. I can only think of two other players in my tenure in the National Football league that have played with any success that made the same transition, and that's Matt Millen and LeVon Kirkland, defensive tackle to nine-time Pro Bowl linebacker."

Carson's athleticism helped smooth the leap to pro linebacker. Timed at 4.65 seconds in the 40-yard dash as a collegian - the Giants converted the 6-2, 235-pounder into an inside linebacker who was equally effective against the run and pass.

"Everything I tried to do, that (then Giants assistant coach Marty Schottenheimer) tried to get me to do, I did ass-backwards, but I think I got the same or better results. He just sort of threw his hands up and just allowed me to go out and play."

All the way to Canton.

"I think we knew all along that he was a shoo-in for the Hall of Fame," former Giants quarterback Phil Simms said. "I'm just proud of him and happy for him and look forward to seeing that day down in Canton."

FORMER PANTHER IN HALL OF FAME CLASS

Minister of Defense mixed faith and football to serve on, off the field

By Arnie Stapleton
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Reggie White was one of the few truly great athletes who transformed his game and changed the people around him.

"Where do we begin? Great player, great person, great teammate," Brett Favre said as he reflected on the legacy of his friend who will be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame on Saturday, a final, fitting tribute to the most honored and perhaps most feared defensive end in NFL history.



White

White, who suffered from sleep apnea and sarcoidosis, died a little more than 18 months ago at age 43.

When news of his stunning death reached Mike Holmgren in Seattle, the man who helped lure the Minister of Defense from Philadelphia to Green Bay in the biggest free-agent move in league history, said simply: "I am a better person for having been around Reggie White."

Amen to that, said LeRoy Butler.

"A lot of leaders wait until you get to the locker room to lead," Butler said. "Not Reggie. He'd go to your house if he had to. You never needed to go looking for Reggie. He came to you."

White had his critics, to be sure, especially after his infamous speech to Wisconsin lawmakers in 1998 when he blasted homosexuality and used ethnic stereotypes when describing the gifts each race brings to the tapestry of humanity.

White apologized for offending so many, but never backed down from what he considered his true calling: to sack sin as much as quarterbacks.

"I hope that my life serving God and doing what he called me to do would overshadow anything I did in football," White told The Associated Press in 1998.

Preaching, praying or playing, White was fervent.

"He'd be picking quarterbacks up saying, 'God bless you,' but he'd be whooping the guy in front of him every time," recalled Denver safety John Lynch. "Really, I think

he's as good a football player as there's ever been. This guy was dominant. He had a presence that was just bigger than life."

White took that same passion from the football field to the pulpit, to inner-city schools, to the streets, to the homeless.

"He ministered to everybody, but his first ministry was to his teammates," Butler said. "Because he knew that if he could get you to live right, the team was better off."

After an All-American senior season at Tennessee, White began his pro career with the Memphis Showboats of the USFL in 1984. He joined the Philadelphia Eagles, who held his NFL rights, after the USFL folded in 1985. For eight years he was an integral piece in Philadelphia's Gang Green defense.

White combined size, speed and strength like no defensive lineman before him, getting a league-high 21 sacks in only 12 games in the strike-shortened 1987 season.

Buddy Ryan, who coached the Eagles from 1986-1990, agreed with Holmgren that White was "probably the best defensive lineman that ever played."

When the NFL welcomed unfettered free agency and the salary cap in 1993, many figured Green Bay, the league's smallest outpost, was doomed. Instead, with White leading the way, the Packers experienced a reversal of fortunes.

His selection of the Packers also proved to other players, particularly blacks, that Wisconsin wasn't a winter wasteland. Before his arrival, Green Bay, a quarter-century removed from the glory days of Vince Lombardi, was known as the frigid outpost where other teams threatened to send their malcontents, the NFL's very own Siberia.

"If he hadn't have come over, we never would have gotten Bruce Wilkerson, Sean Jones, Ron Cox, Andre Rison, Desmond Howard, all these guys we won a championship with," Butler said. "He changed us from a place nobody wanted to go to a place where, by the mid '90s, we had to turn free agents away."

White and his wife, Sara, appreciated the unpretentious nature of Green Bay. While they were being wined

and dined at the finest restaurants across the country, the Packers took them to Red Lobster to make their pitch.

"I told him, 'You're already a great football player. Come here and you'll be a legend,'" recalled former general manager Ron Wolf.

He did, and a faded franchise shined anew.

Opponents game-planned around White and his enormously powerful club move, and so did the Packers.

"You just knew," said Keith Jackson, who played with White in Philadelphia and Green Bay, "that if you needed a game closed out, he was going to be the guy to close it out."

That's precisely what he did in the biggest game of his life, the Super Bowl following the 1996 season, when he sacked Drew Bledsoe a record three times to secure Green Bay's 35-21 win over New England.

White played 15 seasons with Philadelphia, Green Bay and Carolina. He retired after the 2000 season as the NFL's career sacks leader with 198, a mark that was subsequently passed by Bruce Smith. A two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year, White was elected to the Pro Bowl a record 13 straight times from 1986-98.

"As intimidating as he was on the field, he was probably the biggest kid in the locker room," Favre said. "And guys were able to go up and talk to him and it didn't feel like he was too big."

Jackson once boasted while they were in Philadelphia that he could block White 1-on-1 and White accepted his challenge. But at the whistle, Jackson stepped to the side and White fell flat on his face, got up laughing and a lifelong friendship was born.

Butler said White was a locker room cutup who could hold his own with Eddie Murphy or Chris Rock.

"He was just a naturally funny guy," Butler said, "a 6-foot-5, 315-pound gentle giant making everyone laugh. I'm laughing right now just remembering him."

"You never needed to go looking for Reggie. He came to you." **LeRoy Butler on Reggie White**

Why read The Post? It's essential



"I couldn't imagine being a resident of Charlotte and not subscribing to The Charlotte Post. It covers a wide range of news and serves a vital function for the African American community and for the entire Charlotte community. The Post does a great job in covering the local issues; not just news, but sports and leisure as well."

Chris Weiller

Call (704) 376-0496 to link
with news that's important to you.

The Charlotte Post

