



You have a “no-cut contract” anecdote, we believe, about Joe Greene, which underlines the relationship you had with him, and he with the Steelers?

When Joe signed his contract he said, “I want a no-cut contract.” He would only have been 20 years old at the time. I told him I’d make him a deal. I’d give him a letter. I said I’d write it right there just so long as he didn’t tell anyone because it wasn’t something we gave to players. He never told a soul. In fact, he never even took the letter. My word was good enough for him.

Does Joe Greene stand out for you? Are there others who you’d care to mention?

Well, Joe Greene’s one of them, that’s for sure. Bradshaw, Franco and Mel Blount. Johnny Unitas is another. I drafted him myself. He was a tremendous player. In fact, he was the player of his decade.

What about the coaches? You’ve had some great ones, starting with Chuck Noll. In the locker room there’s a quote from a speech he gave after a win that said: “I’m proud of you, it was a great win, go celebrate but we have a very important game next week so don’t celebrate too much. I’ll see you on Tuesday.”

That’s the way he was. I rate him in the top five that ever coached in the league. I’ll put George Hows in there because he did everything. He’d be the first because he upped the game. Then Vince Lombardi. Great player, great coach. Then Noll.

While other teams have chopped and changed you have only used three coaches in the last 45 years. In professional sport today that’s incredible. Is this a pre-determined policy?

Patience is a virtue. We believe in stability, in giving a guy a chance. It all adds to the family, to the togetherness of the team. That’s one of the reasons why we hired Chuck Noll. We liked his philosophy, and we liked how he knew all about our team. Making constant changes rarely works.

Another aspect of your time with the Steelers is the introduction of the Rooney Rule. This must be something you’re very proud of, not just from the Steelers point of view but for the league as whole.

That’s right. We worked to give the minorities the opportunity to reach the top. We did a couple of things and then found a particular way of doing it which worked. Let’s say — whether it was called the Rooney Rule or not — the purpose of it was to give everybody a chance; and to recognize that there are black men that can be as good a coach as anyone else. That’s the thing, to give them a chance. So, we said if you’re going to hire a coach, you must interview at least one minority. And that opened the door for everybody.

Finally, of all the Super Bowls do you have a favorite? Or are they like children, each very special in their own right?

They are. The only difference is the first because it is the first and therefore extra-meaningful. The first one stands out but the rest are still very important to me and to the Steelers. Even the Super Bowls we lost have meaning. We lost two. We went a long way in those seasons, too, just to fall at the end. They all remain vivid in my memories.



Left A proud day for Chuck Noll on the day of his enshrinement into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, July 3rd, 1993.

Top Mike Tomlin soon added another Lombardi Trophy to the Steelers’ cabinet, making them the first franchise in the NFL to win six championships.