



# Rites of Passing . . . and Rushing

## Growing up with Warren Conference

By Calvin Watkins

It has a long-standing tradition of excellence. A tradition fueled by football and sportsmanship.

Since 1950, the Warren Football Conference has sent many small boys from its Pee-Wee football leagues to young adulthood in the big leagues.

Yes, that's right, the National Football League. At least 30 former players of the WFC have played in the NFL in one form or another. From starting running back **Ronnie Harmon**, who played with the San Diego Chargers, to defensive back Mike D'Amato of the 1968 Super Bowl champions, the New York Jets.

At the WFC awards banquet on Jan. 12 and 14, more than 500 trophies for youngsters 8 to 16 were handed out. A packed house at a Queens restaurant greeted the players with warmth and loud cheers.

The league, which started with four teams in 1950, has grown to 71 with seven age and weight classes.

With the help of sponsors, the Hofstra football program and another football organization in North Haven, Conn., the commissioner, 71-year-old Nick Mitsakos, has kept the program strong.

Very strong. "Everyone has been helpful to us over the years," said Mitsakos, who also gets help from ex-NFL players Joe Namath and John Dockery. "It's been a very successful program."

The objective of Mitsakos and the league coaches has been the kids: having fun, playing safe and, best of all, winning.

Mitsakos says winning isn't everything; being a good role model is. The league keeps the kids out of trouble and is just as important as winning a few ballgames.

"We're trying to keep kids off the street," Mitsakos said. "The goal, of course, is the kids. We want the kids to come back and enjoy themselves when they play for us."

Who wouldn't come back to a league where 2,300 players took to the fields this past fall from all five boroughs and Long Island? The games are played all over, such as at Erasmus High School in Brooklyn and at Levitt Field in Flushing.

Doesn't matter where the games are played, the bottom line is to make sure the kids are having fun.

The MVP of each team and the players of all the teams that made the playoffs receive a trophy. That's something not every league can afford.

In some of the key championship games, the intermediate division was the most compelling.

The Forest Hills Falcons defeated the Bayside Raiders Youth Football Organization in the title



Newsday Photos / Audrey C. Tiernan

game, 8-0, in late December.

Players from both teams, as well as coaches, were honored at the banquet. The Raiders' championship run was their first in the 15-16 age bracket. The title game was scoreless until a fourth-quarter score by the Falcons.

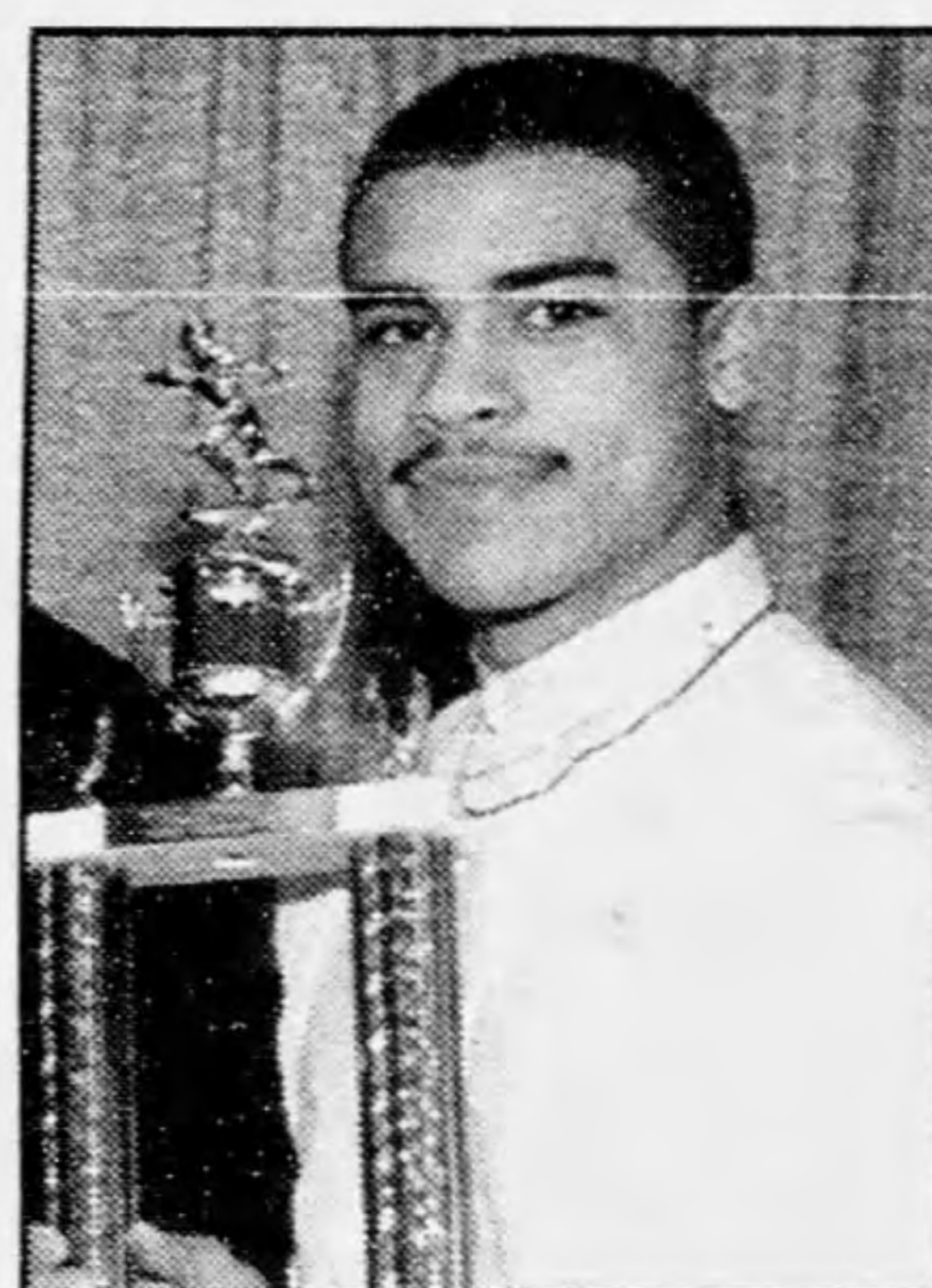
It ended a trio of games between the two teams in which the Raiders lost for the third straight time.

Also, the Raiders' senior team defeated the Staten Island Jaguars, 20-14, to win its first championship this past season.

A lot of fun was had by several champions of the league. Lynvet (9-1) finished first in the midget division of 13-year-olds.

The Forest Hills Falcons went undefeated and won the Super Bowl in the bantam division of 14-year-olds by defeating Bayside.

Another great series involved Kings Bay Midgets and the Lynvet Midgets. Lynvet won the first meeting, 14-12, and Kings Bay took the second contest, 12-8. In the final, Kings Bay took the midget title with a 22-0 victory. Lynvet, which has been in the league



Above, from left, coaches of the Warren Football Conference Super Bowl championship teams: Vincent D'Acunto, Kings Bay Jaguars; Merv Dublin, Brooklyn Sky Hawks; Don Childress, Forest Hills Falcons. Left, 16-year-old Shaun Leonardo, the Falcons' MVP.

almost 30 years, has won eight of the last 12 titles. Who needs the Dallas Cowboys' three Super Bowl championships in four years? They may have Super Bowl rings, but Mitsakos and Co. have spirit and the kids have fun.

Calvin Watkins is a free-lance writer.

## NOTEBOOK

### ASTORIA PARK / Help for Hoops

The Astoria Park basketball courts will get a new look by the summer. The not-for-profit City Parks Foundation will donate \$14,000 to resurface, apply new lines, repair the baskets and even add spectator benches.

### FOREST HILLS / Club Seeks Scrummers

The Forest Hills Rugby Club is looking for new members. Practices are Tuesday and Thursday evenings starting the first week of March. Call Joseph Ferrick at (718) 793-7813 for information.

### FLUSHING / Basketball League Play Begins

The Flushing YMCA, 138-46 Northern Blvd., has begun its adult basketball league. Games will be played in two divisions, Monday and Thursday

nights. The league has a 10-game season in each division. Also, the YMCA will host a sports memorabilia dinner and auction at Terrace on the Park on Feb. 8 at 7:30 p.m. Proceeds will benefit the YMCA. For information, call (718) 961-6880.

### COLLEGE POINT / Softball Registration Continues

The College Point softball league is still accepting registration for teams of players, 18 and older, for its limited-arc doubleheader league. Games are played at the College Point Sports Complex, McNeal Park and Frank Golden Field. Call (718) 463-2729 for more information.

### WHITESTONE / Touch Football Begins

The 10-game Whitestone Touch Football League season has begun. The league, one of the most successful in Queens, finished its first round of the fall playoff season. Upback, C. J. Sullivan, Red

Heat and Red Bault have advanced to the semifinals. For more information, call (718) 746-9809.

### BAYSIDE / Little League Clinic Set

The Bayside Little League will hold a managing and coaching clinic next Sunday from 7 to 9 p.m. at Our Lady of Blessed Sacrament school, 34-24 203rd St. Call (718) 225-0178 for more information.

### Newsday Connection

Staffer Scott Engel, whose work formerly filled this space, has left. With your help, I will be filling his shoes. Please direct all information by phone to (718) 575-2551, by fax to (718) 793-6422 or by mail to my attention. Write to: Calvin Watkins, c/o Newsday, 80-02 Kew Gardens Rd., Kew Gardens, N.Y. 11415. — Calvin Watkins