

Feb. 3, 2020

--PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME WILLIE WOOD, 1959 USC FOOTBALL CAPTAIN WHO PLAYED IN FIRST 2 SUPER BOWLS, DIES

LOS ANGELES--Pro Football Hall of Famer Willie Wood, captain of the 1959 USC football team who played in the first 2 Super Bowls, died today (Feb. 3) of natural causes in Washington, D.C. He was 83.

Services are pending.

Wood was a 3-year (1957-59) letterman quarterback and defensive back with the Trojans, serving as a captain as a senior when the team went 8-2. He was the first African-American quarterback in what is now the Pac-12. In his career, he completed 55-of-147 passes (60.5%) for 772 yards with 5 touchdowns, rushed for 331 yards on 124 carries with 3 TDs and had 7 interceptions. He shared time at quarterback as a 1957 sophomore and also led USC in punt returns. A shoulder injury early in the 1958 season slowed him most of his junior campaign and he suffered another shoulder injury in 1959 that sidelined him for several games. He topped USC in interceptions (5) and pass deflections in 1959.

Wood was undrafted out of USC, but signed as a free agent with the Green Bay Packers and played safety there for 12 years (1960-71). He was a 9-time All-NFL first or second team honoree, and played in 8 Pro Bowls and 6 NFL Championship games (winning 5), including Super Bowls I and II (winning both). He had a key interception in Super Bowl I that sealed the Packers' victory and he had a 31-yard punt return in Super Bowl II that was the longest in a Super Bowl for 16 years. In his career, he had 48 interceptions and gained 1,391 yards on 187 punt returns. His 154 starts was an NFL career record for a safety.

He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1989 and the Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame in 1977. He was named to the NFL 1960s All-Decade Team.

Wood went into coaching after his playing career. He was the head coach of the World Football League's Philadelphia Bell in 1975 (becoming the first African-American head coach in the modern era of pro football) and the Canadian Football League's Toronto Argonauts in 1980 and 1981 (becoming the CFL's first African-American head coach). He also was an assistant coach with the San Diego Chargers and Argonauts.

After coaching, he opened his own business in the Washington, D.C. area, Wood Mechanical Systems.

He is regarded as one of D.C.'s greatest high school athletes after starring at Armstrong High. A street in D.C. is named "Willie Wood

Way.”

He came to USC after playing the 1956 season at Coalinga (Calif.) Junior College, where he was a JC All-American.

Wood is survived by sons Willie Jr., who coached at D.C.’s Woodrow Wilson High and in the Arena Football League, and Andre, and daughter LaJuane, along with a sister and several nephews and nieces. He was predeceased in 1988 by his wife, Sheila.