

Thoughts and Reflections from Wellington Mara's Colleagues and Friends

(in alphabetical order)

October 25, 2005

Ernie Accorsi, Giants General Manager

First of all, my heart is breaking for this wonderful family. Second, Wellington Mara was a second father to me and to everyone in this organization. I knew him for 33 years and worked for him for 12. I never came to work without looking to him for guidance, for wisdom and, especially, for inspiration. I tried to savor every moment that I ever spent with him and never for a second took that privilege for granted. It was an honor just to be in his organization.

The NFL can never be the same. He saw the first game ever played by this franchise in 1925. He shaped nearly every rule and philosophy we have in our league today. And most of all, he was the moral conscience of the National Football League. He now joins the pantheon of incredible men who made this league what it has become: George Halas, Pete Rozelle, Art Rooney, Paul Brown, Leon Hess, Vince Lombardi, all of whom left us with a feeling of emptiness with their passing.

Tiki Barber, Giants Player, 1997-present

One of the things I miss the most this year is seeing him at every practice, sitting on that golf chair he always had. There was always a certain level of accountability, even in practice, because we always knew he was watching us. And after games, you'd walk into the locker room and he'd be standing right there to shake your hand, win or lose. That was one of the true moving feelings about playing for the New York Giants, having your accountability given to you as soon as you walked into that locker room. We'll miss that for years to come.

When you think about what he meant to the history of the Giants and our league, he was such a great force for our game. He was such a dignified and in some ways, regal, character who always respected the game and respected what this league is about. He was the cornerstone for what the NFL tries to be, and we'll all miss that.

I was up at his house yesterday (Monday). Jeremy Shockey and I went. We were able to say a prayer and say goodbye, and that meant a lot to me.

Tom Benson, owner of the New Orleans Saints

It is with great sorrow that the entire New Orleans Saints organization and I learned of Wellington Mara's passing this morning. Through his ownership of the New York Giants, Wellington had been one of the cornerstones of the entire NFL, a vital link to the league's past and an innovator when it came to new ways to make the NFL better for the fans. Personally, he had been a longtime friend and confidante; I respected him immensely and always found his advice to be wise. He will be missed.

Steve Bisciotti, owner of the Baltimore Ravens

Every owner, every person who works with an NFL team, every fan, anyone who benefits from this exciting league...we owe thanks to Wellington Mara. He was an integral part of the foundation of this league, part of the fabric of the game. I feel

privileged that I knew him, and honored that he made me feel so welcome into the league. When we reflect on all he did for others and for the game, we'll also remember his dignity, his class, his manner, his kind ways and his great family.

Pat Bowlen, owner of the Denver Broncos

The finest values of society and professional football were all represented by Wellington Mara. His dignity, faith and loyalty to our sport and to what America itself represents were of the highest order. Wellington Mara was an icon, and while his loss diminishes all of us, everyone who knew or was influenced by him is better for it.

Harry Carson, Giants Player, 1976-88

When George Young passed away, everybody looked at him as a brilliant general manager. I looked at him more as a person. I feel the same way about Mr. Mara. He was a tremendous owner. I didn't want to come to New York when I was drafted. But coming and finally understanding the rich history and tradition of the organization really gave me an appreciation for playing with the Giants. The thing that stands out in my mind about Wellington Mara was, even though he was the owner, he was like a player. After every game, he was the first one to come into the locker room. After a win, you'd see a big, broad smile on his face and congratulate every player. After a loss, he'd come around and tell the players to hold their head up. He was one of us.

I think every player who has played for the Giants organization, regardless of his lot – whether he was successful with the organization or not – every player respected Mr. Mara. I think Mr. Mara, in turn, respected every player, and not just as a player, but as people, as men.

My relationship with Mr. Mara was probably a little different than a lot of other's. As captain, we found ourselves in some situations together and I was privy to his generosity with other people. Those are the stories that a lot of people would never hear. For example, the situation with Doug Kotar, and Mr. Mara taking care of his medical bills.

In winning the Super Bowl, I think George Martin, myself – guys that had been around – in winning a championship, we were happy for ourselves, but we were also happy for him, because we knew some of the stuff he went through with the fans and the media back in the '70s and early '80s. That was part of the good part of winning a championship. We were able to bring a winner to the Giants fans, but more so for Mr. Mara and his family, because they've been around for a long time. We had gone through a lot of ups and downs together.

He was a good man. As players, we look at him as being one of us. Even though he was the man who signed the checks, he was still one of us. A couple of years ago, when we were together (at a surprise party in New York to honor his then-79 years of service to the Giants and the NFL) with all those players coming back, you could definitely tell that his players loved him

Tom Coughlin, Giants Head Coach, 2004-present

As sad as this day is, over the course of the last few days I personally have reflected on the celebration of the life of Wellington Mara. I think of the profound influence that he has had on so many coaches, so many people in this profession. When I was fortunate enough to be hired as the head coach of the New York Giants, the first

thing he said to me was “welcome home.” I think he felt that way about anybody that had the privilege of wearing the Giant red, white and blue. It was a family. He thought about you and cared about you as a member of his family.

I’ve never seen or been around someone who garnered so much respect just by walking into a room. I’ll never forget when I was here as an assistant in 1988. We lost the last game of the year to the New York Jets and didn’t go into the playoffs. The next day he was in the coaches’ meeting room, and he went from coach to coach, shaking everybody’s hand. In 1989 we were in the playoffs and the next year we won the Super Bowl. We never saw him at that time. He didn’t have to be there. He was there when he was needed. He always said and did the right thing.

I remember as a youngster when I started to watch Sunday afternoon football on my family’s black and white television. That’s when I first heard the Wellington Mara. Then I had the privilege of getting to know Mr. Mara when I had opportunity to coach here. I’ve always been amazed by not only his years of service to this organization, but his never-ending excitement, interest and enthusiasm for practice, the draft, the draft meetings, having in-depth knowledge about players, having a real strong sense of opinion about issues and sharing them in the right way. He recognized that people were hired to fulfill certain positions, but he always had direct line of communication with them concerning any issue which was important to the New York Giants. I know what a difficult thing it was for him this summer not to come to training camp. He loved training camp.

What a great example he is to all of us, not only in this profession, but in all walks of life. His devotion to his family, his devotion to his God, his strength of character, his virtue. I’ve had the privilege of listening to him speak. He was very passionate about what he had to say. You talk about a man displaying humility in victory and pride in defeat – he was the walking example of that slogan. He always kept things in the correct perspective. He didn’t always have a lot to say, but you always took absolute note of what he did say.

It’s very difficult for me right now to think about the New York Giants without Wellington Mara sitting in that office every day. But I do know what he would want from all of us, and it’s about carrying on. That’s exactly what his legacy would be. One day before he went into the hospital I knew he was in the office, so I went down to see him. We talked back and forth and maybe a minute or two into the conversation, he said, ‘Well Tom, you better get back to work.’ Back down the hall he sent me.

We knew he was ill, but you’re afraid of this day. But it’s not about selfish thoughts. It’s about personal thoughts today, it’s about your relationship with a very, very special man. Once the sadness gets put into its rightful place, this is a day of celebration in terms of recognizing the profound affect his life had on so many people that he touched.

Jim Fassel, Giants Head Coach, 1997-2003

There were three things in Mr. Mara’s life: family, religion and the Giants. His influence was evident throughout the Giants’ organization. He set an example of the right way to live and to treat people with respect. He was a gentle soul in a tough business. But, he was also a man’s man, being tough when he had to be. He was so good to me and my family. There aren’t many people walking this earth who have the goodness

Wellington Mara possessed. The NFL has lost a pioneer, one of the few responsible for what the league is today.

Frank Gifford, longtime friend, Giants Player, 1952-60, 62-64

We started out as boss and player and Wellington was almost like my father – I was probably closer to him than I was to my father. He went through so many crises with me and was always there, like he was for everyone else whoever played for him. As we got older I told him, ‘no longer can I say you’re a great father figure. You’re my friend, and the dearest one I’ve ever had.’ He was extraordinary.

A couple of years ago, when we got all the old Giants together, I know he enjoyed it. But I think we enjoyed it even more. The one common thing we all had was that he had done something for all of us. A lot of it came out that night when we got together. That was Wellington. He did something for everyone, he touched everyone he ever came in contact with. Some of us were blessed because we had more contact than others.

The NFL would not be the NFL that it grew into without Wellington’s influence. When the league got its first television contract, he realized it had to be equally distributed so everybody could be competitive. That was a major thing that he did, along with his brother, Jack. Even though they had the largest television market, he said the money should be distributed equally. They knew it was better for football and the future of football by sharing the money equally. He was the one, along with his brother Jack, who made that sacrifice. He not only made that sacrifice, it was his idea.

It’s so sad to lose him, but Wellington had such a perfect life. He was very happy in his faith, he had 11 children and 40 grandchildren, and his children are just like he is. He had everything everyone tries to have. He had what we all strive for. He was honest, decent, kind, thoughtful – all those words people usually just get up and spout. But they were real with him.

Sam Huff, Giants Player, 1956-63

I remember when I met Wellington. It was 1956. That was the year I got out of college and I was with the All-American football team in New York. We were going to be on the Ed Sullivan Show. ‘We drafted you and I wanted to talk to you – my name is Wellington Mara.’ I did not know who Wellington Mara was. But I remember getting a letter from him saying they drafted me. And ever since that first meeting, I remember every moment that we ever spent together.

He was always there. When we were on the field, he was always standing on the side. Our football team wanted to see him there. A lot of football teams don’t want to see the owner around. But the Giants did. He was the man. You never thought about him being the owner. When you think about what he produced – Vince Lombardi, Tom Landry, all the great players and great guys he traded for, like Y.A. Tittle – it was just such an experience playing for the Giants. It was an honor that you could never forget.

I guess everybody has a godfather. I had a friend when I was in West Virginia. His name was John Manchin. His son is now the governor of West Virginia. He helped me through high school and college and gave me a job. When I went to New York City, Wellington Mara was like my godfather. I can’t imagine him not being there. I never met a finer man than him. I can’t imagine him not being there.

Whenever the Giants came to FedEx Field, I would find him and talk to him. He was like a father. A lot of me teammates felt the same way. My daughter sent me a poem that reads:

*"Sometimes we let affection go unspoken.
Sometimes we let our thanks go unexpressed.
Sometimes we can't find words to tell our feelings, especially toward those we admire
and respect."*

And that's the way it was with Wellington. He and his family were always there. They were family to me.

What Wellington did for the National Football League: he was the savior of the NFL. You wouldn't have 32 teams today if it wasn't for Wellington Mara. He made more contributions to the league than anybody – even more than the three commissioners.

Art Modell, longtime friend and former owner of Baltimore Ravens and Cleveland Browns

We have lost the conscience of the league. Well was my friend for 45 years, and I never had a better friend. He was like my brother. He was a man of extraordinary character, integrity and decency. He was a kind man who rarely spoke in anger, never used profanity, and was never untoward anyone. Personally, this is very, very sad, but it is also a sad day for anyone associated with football. We have lost a giant.

Bill Parcells, Giants Head Coach, 1983-90

To anyone who's ever been a Giant, this is the saddest of days. Well Mara was a wonderful and generous man. He was a major influence in my life, and I was proud to have him as a friend.

Dan Reeves, Giants Head Coach, 1993-96

I knew him prior to coming to the Giants and admired him as an owner for all the years I was in Denver. I saw him at the league meetings, and he was just such a classy person. When I got the job with the Giants and got to know him even better, I got to love him even more. He was just a solid person. He always made you feel very comfortable, he was always willing to do whatever he needed to do to try to help you do your job better. He was just a great person to work for.

He had so many great stories, I wanted him to write a book. Of course he was so humble, he said, 'I don't need to write one, I don't deserve one.' But if he did it for no one else he should do it for his grandkids, because he had so many great memories and great stories that would be great for all of us to know about. He was just a great man. I can't say enough good things about him. He was one of the real true gentleman I ever met in the National Football League.

Jerry Richardson, Owner, Carolina Panthers

The National Football League would not be what it is today without Wellington Mara. He provided direction when the League was trying to become established and perspective when it flourished. When our family became a part of the NFL, he was

always there to offer guidance. No one was more generous with their time for everyone. He was admired and respected by all who came in contact with him, but most of all by his fellow owners and the players and coaches of the New York Giants.

Andy Robustelli, Giants Player, 1956-64, Giants Director of Operations, 1974-78

Mr. Mara was just a great, great, great person who was so good for everyone he ever came in contact with. He and I had a long personal relationship. When you think of the Giants, you think of Wellington Mara. It wasn't that you worked for Wellington Mara, you were working with him. He never made you feel like you were working for him. It was like he was another ballplayer. And the relationship between ballplayers is that you play together and you do things together. That was the kind of relationship he had with everyone. And that was true not only with the Giants, but throughout the National Football League. He never put the Giants before anybody, but with whomever he was working.

Dan Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers

Wellington Mara was a special person. He brought dignity to everyone he touched. He loved his wife, Ann, and his wonderful family. He truly was a Giant in the NFL and in life. His players over the decades loved him. He meant so much in forming the foundation and standards of the National Football League. He was kind to all and treated everyone with class. His integrity was in the forefront in every action and decision he made. His contributions to the NFL are second to none.

Wellington was a mentor for me and a counsel I could call on. I remember when the Steelers were asked to join the American Football Conference. I was very reluctant to become part of the AFC and was upset at the prospects. Wellington quietly said, "Dan, don't become agitated. Just wait and see where this goes."

It worked out for the best and was very successful for the Steelers. He was there to help and offer advice that could work for the League and anyone who might need assistance. During most of Wellington's years with the team, the New York Giants had great teams and played terrific games, winning championships.

The Rooney family has been friends of the Maras for four generations. We've had excellent times together. Of course, our battles on the gridiron were fierce. Our relationship has been meaningful and enjoyable and the games have been fun. We will all miss Wellington Mara as we celebrate his wonderful life.

God Bless and keep him.

Allie Sherman, Giants head coach, 1961-68; Giants assistant coach, 1949-53, 59-60

Wellington Mara dedicated himself to the most important things in his life: his family, his faith, and the entire Giant organization. This will always be his legacy. I will always treasure the years we worked and spent time together. I greatly admired Wellington on both a personal and professional level. He possessed a remarkable ability to understand and unite people, which, combined with his acumen for business, made him one of the great architects of the professional football industry.

Phil Simms, Giants player, 1979-93

Mr. Mara was right. You don't appreciate it until you quit, but there is no such thing as ex-Giants, there are just old Giants. Since I quit playing, I appreciate that a lot more.

As a player, you play for yourself and your family and all your friends and your team. And I always wanted to play and do well to please Mr. Mara and the Mara family. One of the best moments after a game was to come into a winning locker room. But to come in and to see him smiling and to have him shake your hand, that made it even more special. And he would be there to shake your hand after every loss, too.

My wife said it best when we talked about Mr. Mara and I told her he was really not doing well. She said, "There are so few icons left." That's what Mr. Mara was. He was from an era where there were certain men who handled themselves differently than everybody else. I don't know if you can be that person anymore in this day and age. I don't know if society would let you be like him.

Paul Tagliabue, Commissioner, National Football League, 1989- present

Wellington Mara represented the heart and soul of the National Football League. He was a man of deep conviction who stood as a beacon of integrity. His passions were many – his family and faith, the Giants, the NFL, and his community. He was an unparalleled leader in many different arenas. He always ensured that the Giants were one of the premier franchises in sports, but he kept the interests of the league at the forefront. When Well Mara stood to speak at a league meeting, the room would become silent with anticipation because all of us knew we were going to hear profound insights born of eight decades of league experience. John Mara now will continue his father's legacy, and we offer our deepest sympathy to Ann, John and the entire Mara family.

Lawrence Taylor, Giants Player, 1981-93

Mr. Mara was the greatest thing that ever happened to the New York Giants. Personally, he always treated me fairly. He was always there to help me, even when I wasn't willing to help myself.

I considered Wellington a friend. He never reprimanded me. When I was doing something wrong, he would tell me. But he was always one of the best men I've ever been around.

Steve Tisch, Giants Executive Vice President, speaking on behalf of the Tisch family

Wellington Mara was a unique figure in the history of the National Football League, and we are deeply saddened by his passing. He was an exemplary owner who had the respect and devotion of his coaches, team managers and entire generations of players. He was a pioneer and innovator who helped create the NFL as we know it today. And he was a loyal and steadfast partner to his co-owners. Wellington Mara will be missed and well remembered by everyone in the Giants organization and will remain an inspiration to it for as long as the franchise exists.

The relationship between the Mara and Tisch families remains one of the great strengths of the Giants organization, and, together, we look forward to building upon the foundation and heritage that Wellington Mara established for many years to come.

Y.A. Tittle, Giants Player, 1961-64

Mr. Mara was the perfect gentleman, the perfect owner. When Alex Webster was the head coach, I came back to help coach the quarterbacks in training camp. My wife is good friends with Ann Mara, so Well and I became good friends. I've always tried to come back for a couple of games each year, and we stayed in touch by telephone.

Well Mara was a perfect friend, he really was. He was a friend of all the players. I can't recall any ballplayer that played for the New York Giants having anything ill to say about Well Mara. Normally that's not the case, because when you have to sign somebody to a contract, some kind of frustration usually carries forward.

I'll tell you a story from when I was a player with the Giants. My wife really liked Mr. Mara. He came to California to sign me after the 1961 season, when I was Player of the Year. So I had intended to really hit him hard when it came to salary negotiations. So I played it hard. I said, "I'm not going to play next year. I'm getting older and I'm going to retire, because it's not worth it." So Wellington came to California to see me and to talk me out of retiring. Minnette invited him to spend the night in our house in our spare bedroom. I told Minnette, "If I'm going to have hard-nosed negotiations, we can't have him stay in our spare bedroom." But that didn't work, because she liked Wellington a lot. So when he came out to talk contract, when I was going to try to play hard and tough, my wife came into the living room and said, "Y.A., would you hurry up and sign that contract, we're 30 minutes late for dinner."

I feel terrible. Well Mara is the true good of pro football. I don't think pro football would be where it is today without the influence that Wellington Mara brought to the league.

Ralph Wilson, owner of the Buffalo Bills

Wellington Mara, whom I knew for more than 40 years, personified the term "sportsman." Wellington was a gentle, well-mannered person enriching football with dignity and class. We served together on numerous committees. His energy was always aimed at helping the game, and he served as a sort of role model for the younger owners coming in.

When you think of Wellington, you link him with the patriarchs who built the National Football League ---George Halas, George Marshall, Curly Lambeau, Art Rooney and others who, in the old days, suffered plenty of pain getting the sport airborne.

My deepest sympathy to Wellington's family and to all members of the New York Giants. We have lost a decent man.