



## **WELLINGTON T. MARA (1916-2005)**

Wellington Mara, the Giants' President and Co-Chief Executive Officer who was a vital member of the franchise for every one of its 81 years, a National Football League icon and one of the most beloved and respected figures in professional sports, died today.

Mara peacefully passed away at his home in Rye, N.Y., at 9:26 a.m. He was surrounded by his wife, Ann, his 11 children and their spouses, and many of his 40 grandchildren. He was 89.

A constant presence throughout his life at games and practices, in the locker room or in his office, Mara had not visited Giants Stadium for several weeks, because he was being treated for his illness. He did not attend training camp this year, nor was he at any games this season.

Mara was diagnosed with cancerous lymph nodes in early April. On May 10, he underwent surgery to remove the cancerous lymph nodes.

In late July, just prior to the beginning of training camp, Mara began receiving radiation treatments, which lasted until late August. He received treatments five times a week, and underwent a total of 33 treatments.

Mara was hospitalized for approximately four weeks beginning in late September. Last Friday, he left the hospital and returned to his Westchester home.

The last Giants game of Mara's life was Sunday's thrilling 24-23 victory over Denver. Prior to the game, Coach Tom Coughlin had talked to the players about Mr. Mara, as well as the Giants' other owner, Bob Tisch, who is suffering from brain cancer. After the Giants won the game on an Eli Manning touchdown pass to Amani Toomer with five seconds remaining, Coughlin spoke to the team in the locker room. The players then came together in a tight circle, raised their hands and chanted, "Duke, Duke, Duke." Mara's nickname was "Duke."

Faith, family and football were the marrow of Mara's life. He was a deeply religious man who attended Mass daily.

It is impossible to overstate the influence Mara had on the Giants and in the NFL. He was one of the most important and influential figures in the history of professional football, a man credited with many of the ideas and innovations that have made the NFL the nation's most popular professional sports league. In 1997, Mara was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, joining his father, Tim Mara, who was a charter member of the Hall of Fame. Wellington Mara attended the induction ceremony then, typically, was back at work the next day.

No one in the history of American sports had a career quite like Wellington T. Mara. Indeed, it's likely no one in any endeavor has been as closely associated with a famed entity as long as Mara has with the New York Giants.

The 2005 season is the Giants' 81<sup>st</sup> in the NFL. It was also Mara's 81<sup>st</sup> with the team. In those eight decades, he held many jobs as the most significant figure in franchise history.

In 1930, Timothy J. Mara, who had purchased the franchise in 1925, turned over the ownership to his two sons, Jack, 22 and Wellington, who was then 14. Thus began a storied career in ownership that continued until his death. During that time Mara was the foundation of the franchise, and for many years he was the chief decision-maker on all football matters. Mara was involved in every aspect of operating the Giants during his eight decades with the team. His first job was a ballboy at training camp. In time he graduated from the on-the-field operations to scouting and general organization, and eventually to the front office executive capacity. Until 1965, Mara was responsible for the franchise's football decisions, while his late brother, Jack, handled the business operations of the team. The Giants played in five NFL Championship Games from 1958-63 and a key to that success were trades engineered by Mara that brought Y.A. Tittle, Andy Robustelli, Del Shofner, Dick Modzelewski, Pat Summerall, Joe Walton, Dick Lynch, Erich Barnes, Bill Svoboda, Harland Svare, Bob Schnelker, Herb Rich, Ed Hughes and Walt Yowarsky, among others, to the Giants. Draft choices Frank Gifford and Rosie Brown went on to become members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, as did Tuffy Leemans, whom Mara had recommended in 1936. The Giants won the NFL Championship in 1956, and of his championship rings, the only one he ever wore was from that title season.

Mara was instrumental in the outstanding accomplishments of the Giants: 26 postseason appearances (the second-highest total in league history), including 18 NFL Divisional championships and six NFL championships, among them the Super Bowl XXI and Super Bowl XXV titles. The only interruption in Mara's Giants career was during World War II, when he served with distinction for more than three years in the Navy, seeing action in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters aboard aircraft carriers and emerging as a Lieutenant Commander.

More than 30 years ago, he began leaving most football decisions to others, but remained a strong, active and essential presence in the organization.

In addition to serving the Giants admirably for so many years, Mara was an invaluable contributor to the NFL as a member of many ownership committees. He has recognized for always putting the league's interests ahead of what was best for the Giants. From 1971 until 1977, he was Chairman of the Executive Committee of the NFL Management Council, the labor arm of the NFL, and under his leadership the league achieved five years of labor peace from 1977 to 1981. Mara was elected President of the National Football Conference in 1984, succeeding the late George Halas in that role. Mara later served on the Hall of Fame committee, as well as the Executive Committee of the Management Council. He was a member of the Competition Committee, replacing Vince Lombardi after his death, for one year before leaving to join the Management Council.

Mara's father, Tim, had purchased the Giants franchise in 1925 to establish a New York entry in the fledgling National Football League. Wellington Mara was nine years old when his father purchased the team, a transaction that began a lifetime dedicated to the Giants and the National Football League. "I always (enjoyed) as a very young kid, going to practice and being up close to the players in the locker room," Mara said early this year. "It was a big, big thing."

It didn't take long for Mara to exert his influence on the franchise. The Giants lost their first two games on the road before making their home debut in the Polo Grounds on Oct. 18, 1925. Mara started the game in the stands with his mother, but eventually worked his way down to the Giants' bench, where he sat with his father. His older brother Jack worked the first down chains. "I remember hearing the coach, Bob Folwell, sending a player, Paul Jappe, into the game saying, 'Go and give them hell,'" Mara said. "And I remember thinking to myself what a rough game this must be."

Especially for a young boy who frequently suffered from colds. Then, as now, most home team benches were on the press box side of the field. Early in the game, the Giants' bench was covered in shadows, which exacerbated the cold Mara had that day. When she saw her son sniffing at home following the Giants' 14-0 loss to the Frankford Yellow Jackets, Mrs. Mara ordered Mr. Mara to move the team's bench to the sunny side of the field. Today, eight decades years later, it remains there, across the field from the press box. In the mid-1970s, Coach Bill Arnsparger asked Wellington to move the bench below the press box. "The visiting team's coaches can see our sideline signals from their seats in the press box," Arnsparger said.

"Get better signals," Mara said. The Giants stayed in the sun.

Jack Mara served as the club's President until his death in 1965. After Jack passed away, his son Tim served as Vice President and Treasurer of the team until Bob Tisch purchased the Jack Mara holdings in 1991. Today, three of Wellington Mara's sons are important members of the organization: John as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer; Chris as Vice President of Player Evaluation; and Frank as Director of Promotions.

Wellington T. Mara – he was actually christened Tim Wellington Mara - was born on Aug. 14, 1916 in New York City. Many of Mara's childhood memories revolved around football – and baseball. Like many New York youngsters, he was a Yankees fan.

"I remember as a kid I was taken down to the Yankees dugout and introduced to Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, which was a big thrill, of course," Mara said this year. "It was in Yankee Stadium, so I know it was after 1923. I remember one day my mother and father took me for a drive. It was a Sunday. And we went to see Yankee Stadium being completed. Then we went up to see my father's new golf club, which was Winged Foot. Both opened in 1923. I would say it was 1924 or '25 that I got to meet Ruth and Gehrig.

"This was before you had a public address system. The public address system consisted of one or two men with megaphones who walked around the periphery who would say, 'Now pitching for New York is so and so.' One of them was a man named Jack Lenz, who was a friend of my father's. He got me down to the dugout so I could meet Ruth and Gehrig."

Mara graduated from Loyola High School, a Jesuit institution across from the family's apartment at 83<sup>rd</sup> Street and Park Avenue. He then attended Fordham University, where he earned his degree in 1937. Jack Mara preceded him to Fordham, where he earned a law degree. But Wellington Mara was only interested in joining his father with the Giants and did so immediately after graduation. Tim, Jack and Wellington Mara formed the team's ruling triumvirate.

"It wasn't much of a structure, it was a just a way we did things that evolved," Wellington said. "Jack was the business manager, and I was the personnel director. I had the time to spend at training camp and practices. I was in close touch with (head coaches) Steve Owen and, later, Jim Lee Howell. We each ran our particular part of the business and then our father ran us. We'd talk things out and come to an agreement with one another on all the major issues.

"Jack was an attorney, and he was the conservative member of the family. During a typical discussion we would have about a player's contract, I'd be in favor of giving the player an amount of money. And Jack would say, 'Suppose we have a bad year?' And my father would say, 'How can we have a bad year?' Jack was pretty conservative, and my father and I both wanted to take a chance."

In those days the players were Mara's contemporaries, and he became close to many of them. Mara was good friends with Ward Cuff, who played several positions for the Giants from 1937-45.

“It was a different era when you went on trips,” Mara said. “When you went to Pittsburgh, instead of getting on a plane and flying for an hour, we’d get on a train, and I think it was a nine-hour trip. We played cards. I was part of a regular group that included Cuff, Orville Tuttle, who was a guard, Ed Danowski – there were maybe four or five of us. We played hearts, or pitch, which was a western game that I learned. We played from one year to the next. At the end of the year you might have won five dollars or lost six. We were a pretty close unit, brought on by going on those long trips together.”

Somewhere along the way, Mara picked up the nickname The Duke. For many years, the NFL’s official football was called The Duke, after Mara.

“It’s from the name Wellington, the Duke of Wellington,” Mara said. “My father said that the Duke of Wellington was a great fighting Irishman. I picked up the nickname when I was around the team and the players called me The Duke. It didn’t bother me. I preferred it to Wellington.

“It was interesting, because most of the guys I went to school with called me Tim (his middle name). Actually, I was christened Timothy Wellington Mara. But for some reason or another, I don’t remember why, it appears in the records as Wellington Timothy.”

Wellington Mara liked to say there are no ex-Giants, just old Giants. To him and his wife, Ann, anyone who wears Giants blue is a member of the family for life.

Of course, Mara was closer to some members of the family than others. His dearest friend was Frank Gifford, who he selected on the first round of the 1952 NFL Draft. Mara and Gifford were each other’s presenters at their Hall of Fame induction ceremonies (Gifford was enshrined in 1977). Gifford demonstrated his loyalty to the Mara family in 1965, when Jack Mara passed away. “He had just arrived in Hawaii on a long-delayed vacation that he really looked forward to,” Wellington Mara said. “When he got there he heard that Jack had died. When he heard that, he got on the next plane back to New York. He said, ‘If it weren’t for Jack Mara, I never would have gotten to New York. I never would have gotten to Hawaii in the first place.’ So we have a special bond. There’s really nothing he would ask me to do that I wouldn’t do.” Mara, a horseracing fan his entire life, frequently played, and often won, a 1-6 daily double on his visits to the racetrack. Gifford’s number in his 12-year Giants career was 16.

The night before the Giants opened the 2003 season – Sept. 6, 2003 to be exact – Gifford hosted a surprise party for Mara at Tavern on the Green in Central Park. More than 85 old Giants from many different eras attended the party, which honored Mara for his then 79-year career with the Giants.

Mara didn’t want to go to New York City that Saturday night. He awoke that day feeling a little under the weather. The Giants were facing the St. Louis Rams the following day, and Mara preferred to spend a quiet evening at home. But Gifford had implored him to go to Manhattan, saying his wife, Kathie Lee, was being honored at a dinner. And since Wellington and Ann Mara were the only family they had in the area, Frank said they simply had to attend. So Mara reluctantly put on a suit and headed to the famed restaurant.

Had Mara known it was he who was being honored, he would have remained home. Mara never enjoyed being in the spotlight. Gifford planned the surprise dinner for almost six months. Somehow, with the help OF Tisch and others in the Giants organization, the Mara family and the most illustrious assemblage of former Giants to ever gather in one room, he pulled it off without Mara ever learning about it.

“He’s done something for almost every Giant I’ve ever known,” Gifford said that night. “And you’ve never heard him say anything about it. He just doesn’t like being in the forefront. But he touched the lives of everyone who was there, including mine, and their families.”

The gathering included Hall of Famers like Lawrence Taylor, Y.A. Tittle, Sam Huff and Rosie Brown to relative unknowns like Billy Stribling, Bob Peviani and Joe Wellborn, plus 10 of his 11 children and the vast majority of his then-37 grandchildren.

The six Hall of Fame players in attendance addressed the crowd, offering tributes to Mara that were both heartfelt and humorous.

Huff told a story about his contract negotiations with Mara, who could be extremely tough in those situations.

“We won the world championship my first year (1956) and I made rookie defensive player of the year at middle linebacker,” Huff said. “I was making seven thousand, five hundred dollars at the time. When I was here you dealt with Mr. Mara. And I wanted to deal with Jack, his brother. Wellington said, ‘He deals with the offense, you have to deal with me.’ I said, ‘I want to deal with the same guy Charlie Conerly and Frank Gifford deal with.’ He said, ‘You’re dealing with me.’ I said, ‘Yes, sir.’ He said, ‘Here’s your raise – five hundred dollars.’ I said, ‘Five hundred dollars.’ He said, ‘Sam, I think you’re worth it.’”

Taylor spoke movingly of his respect for and devotion to Mara.

“Wellington has been there for me throughout the years,” Taylor said. “I’ve had my problems. But while I played ball and after ball was over, he was always there. He never told me what to do. He’d say, ‘You know what you have to do.’”

He'd never sit there and say, 'You can't do this' or 'You can't do that.' He was always ready to help me. I will always, always appreciate that."

"He's been as much my family as my family is," Gifford said. "He could be the perfect father, you'd be blessed to have him as a brother, and more than anything he's the best friend you can ever have. I think most of the guys (who attended the party) feel the same way. I talked to most of these guys individually, and each one of them had a story of something he had done for them. And these were not related to football. It had to do with their family, or they needed this or needed that, their kid needed a doctor."

Players from all generations of Giants have the same memories of Mara, because he changed little over the years. Humble and hardworking, Mara was still in his Giants Stadium office regularly until his last illness. From 1925 through the 2004 season, he attended every practice and game he possibly could. At the former, he used to watch while circling the field in a brisk walk, getting in his daily exercise as he watched the team prepare for its next game. Mara visited the locker room after every game, shaking hands with the coaches and players following a victory, offering words of encouragement after a defeat.

"His sense of pride was tremendous," said Phil Simms, one of many former Giants who keep in touch with Mara. "I'll never forget this – we were coming out of training camp – it might have been 1986. Somebody got an interview with him. He didn't make a prediction. He said, 'I'm happy. The team was organized, the coach worked them hard and they conducted themselves well.' I went, 'Wow, that's it.' I remember thinking that is so cool – that's the essence of what we are. And that's what makes him happy. Why? That's the way he wanted his team to act and be. But he also knew that's what's going to lead you to victory."

Mara is survived by the former Ann Mumm, who he married in 1954. They have 11 children: John Kevin, Susan Ann, Timothy Christopher, Stephen Vincent, Francis Xavier, Sheila Marie, Kathleen Mary, Maureen Elizabeth, Ann Marie, Meghan Ann, and Colleen Elizabeth. The Maras also have 40 grandchildren.