

July 17, 2010

LARRY STATION COMPLETES INDUCTION TO COLLEGE FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME

SOUTH BEND, IN - - Hawkeye football fans will never forget the game: top-ranked Iowa hosting second-ranked Michigan in Kinnick Stadium in 1985. The winner would have the upper hand in the race for the Big Ten title and Rose Bowl invitation.

The Hawkeyes rallied to win that contest, 12-10, on a Rob Houghtlin field goal on the final play of the game. As all-America quarterback Chuck Long drove the Iowa offense into position for Houghtlin's game winner, linebacker Larry Station was on the Iowa sidelines, knowing he and his defensive teammates had made Iowa's last scoring drive a possibility. With Michigan facing a key third and short, it was Station who shot the gap, tackling running back Jamie Morris for a two-yard loss and forcing a Wolverine punt.

Now, some 25 years later, Station reflects back on his career at Iowa and "the play" he is most remembered for making during his all-America career as a Hawkeye.

"When most people talk about my career, they talk about that game and the play against Jamie Morris in the fourth quarter," recalled Station, in South Bend for the final step in his induction into the College Football Hall of Fame. "That's why I would tell players, as well as fans, you know you're entire season can wind down to one play. You never know when that play is coming; you have to prepare as well as you can, so that in the fourth quarter, when those plays usually happen, you are ready, both mentally and physically, to make that play when it is needed. Those types of plays are what win championships and national titles. That is why you train hard, so when you are needed to make a big play in the fourth quarter, you have more energy than the other guy, to make a play for your team in order to win the game. That's how you win national titles."

Station's great play throughout his career did lead to Iowa winning the 1985 Big Ten title. The Hawkeyes earned a trip to the Rose Bowl, the second of three trips to Pasadena for the Hawkeyes under Coach Hayden Fry. Because of his outstanding career, Station is the 14th former Iowa player or coach to gain enshrinement in the Hall of Fame, where he joins Fry and former teammate Long. He was a team captain and Most Valuable Player and a finalist for both the Lombardi and Butkus awards as a senior. He was a three-time first team all-Big Ten selection while helping Iowa post a 35-13-1 record.

Station know he enjoyed success at Iowa doe to a lot of hard work, and because he had outstanding coaches and teammates. He also knows he had help in earning the Hall of Fame honor. When he was notified of his selection, his thoughts included a lot of other people.

"My first thought was that this is such an honor to be inducted, because there are so many great players," said Station. "To be among this group is a great honor, and I'm very proud to be a part of the group. At the same time, I think of all the people that helped me and supported me along the way; my parents, coaches, teammates, the athletic trainers, the people who provided academic support, there are so many people who played a vital role in getting me to this point."

Station is one of 24 members of the current Hall of Fame class, with the first step being taken in New York City in December, and the final step being the activities in South Bend this weekend. Having met and mingled with the other members of his Hall of Fame class, Station makes the point on how fortunate he has been.

“The first thing that comes to mind,” noted Station, while gathered with friends and family Friday evening, “Is that I was very blessed. A lot of great players don’t get in the Hall of Fame, due to injuries, maybe because they did not have the guidance and support that I had; so I owe all that to my parents. When I was growing up, they installed certain values and discipline into me, which facilitated me reaching these goals. No matter what goals I had, those principals, values and discipline, would have been helpful to me no matter what I pursued. It is a blessing. It’s not something you can plan out, and I’m very grateful.”

The current Hall of Fame class includes another former Big Ten linebacker in Ohio State’s Chris Spielman. The two were similar in style, and reputation. “When you talk about this Hall of Fame class, there are two members who stand out in my mind as football players,” said Mike Golic, who played at Notre Dame and in the NFL before becoming a part of ESPN Radio’s popular “Mike & Mike in the Morning” show. “That is Larry Station and Chris Spielman.”

As a high school senior in Omaha, Station wanted to attend the Air Force Academy, he wanted to fly.

“I applied to the Air Force Academy,” said Station. “I was totally committed and prepared to go to the Air Force, four years in college, then another four years. I had submitted everything, all on time. But, I did not hear anything back until the day before signing date. Coach Hatfield, called the day before signing date, he said I had qualified and they wanted me to come out right away for a visit. But at that point I had told Coach (Bill) Snyder I was going to Iowa. I felt I needed to keep my word; I wasn’t prepared to break my word. Coach Hatfield said they had misplaced my application. I told him it was too late.”

Having not heard back from anyone at the Air Force Academy, Station looked elsewhere. His final choices came down to Iowa, UCLA and Nebraska. In the end, Station felt best about Iowa, Coach Fry and the Hawkeye coaching staff.

“The No. 1 thing was that the Iowa coaches were dedicated to winning, yet they cared enough about you as a player, to give you the tools and the instruction to show you how to win,” pointed out Station. “They had the knowledge on how to win, it wasn’t just about them being good coaches; they were good people as well. They really had a genuine interest in the well being of players beyond football. Coach Fry was somebody who would make sure that would happen. The fact that Iowa was close to my home and my parents could see me play, that was a big plus as well.”

When Station chose the Hawkeye program, he did hear from others that he was making a mistake. “It was a leap of faith,” said Station, looking back at the Iowa program in the early 1980’s. “I knew it had to be a coach that was committed to winning and doing what was necessary to win. I believe teams that win championships don’t always have the best athletes, but they do have the best prepared teams, the best conditioned teams, and they do have the best coaching. As long as I felt confident in the coaches, I felt they would do what was necessary to prepare us physically and mentally; then relative to the strategy, be more than able to handle the strategy to win games. I had no apprehension that we would be able to have a successful program, even though a lot of people thought I had made a mistake in choosing Iowa.”

The rest, you could say, is history. Station is the only player to lead Iowa in tackles four consecutive years. He is still Iowa’s all-time leader with 496 career tackles. He is one of two Iowa players to earn consensus all-America status in more than one season. In addition, he earned academic all-America honors as well.

“In terms of academics, first and foremost, that came from home,” pointed out Station. “My parents (Anna and Larry, Sr.) had a commitment and demanded that I do well in school; and if I didn’t, there would be consequences, that I would not be allowed to do other things that I wanted to do. My older sister, Laree, was a good role model as well, she got very good grades. That lent me to wanting to do the same things.

Plus, my parents had a reward system in place; I received a dollar for an A, and a dollar would buy a lot of candy back then.”

Following his Hawkeye career, Station was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was able to play just part of one season in the NFL, but he has no regrets.

“My first year in the NFL was very exciting,” he recalled. “I was living out a childhood dream, even though I was only able to play half of the season. Playing on a team with some childhood idles, John Stallworth, Donnie Shell, Mike Webster was an all-Pro at that time, every day I was there was a blessing. It was an honor to be playing on that level. When millions of guys would love to have that opportunity, I was fortunate to have a job in the NFL.”

Station had injured his back in his final game as a Hawkeye, and the back injury became a factor again during the middle of his rookie season, ultimately forcing Station to retire after that first season.

“I had no remorse or regrets about my career ending due to my back injury,” said Station. “I enjoyed every day I was there. When I re-injured my back towards the end of that year, I thought that might end my career, so I started to mentally prepare myself for that. I went back to mini-camp after my injury, but I told my agent that I would not pursue my playing career. I felt that my back was not strong enough to really do justice to my performance and I hung up my cleats.”

Station turned to education to take the next step in his career. He earned his M.B.A. from Washington University in St. Louis and later worked in the business world in Chicago. He later returned to Omaha, taking over ownership of the corner grocery store from his parents.

Station has since sold the family business, but remains in Omaha with his three children, son Larry Station III (12), and daughters Imani (16) and Nia (10). Imani is preparing for her senior year in high school. Station is putting the finishing touches on a book while raising his children.

“The thing that brings me full circle, is thinking of the people, my parents, coaches, my teammates and other players; that have helped me” said Station. “It has made me reflect on the lessons I learned, the things I did right, or could have done better. It inspired me to write a book that is a guide for parents who want to help their student-athletes achieve as much as possible while they are in school, from elementary to middle school to high school. It talks about how to help prepare them physically and mentally, as far as academics, to be recruited on the high school level, to be recruited to play a college sport.

“I’ve been sharing knowledge and information from my experiences with my children,” he added. “They are involved in golf, tennis, baseball. Things I’ve learned from watching others, to help them, and other kids as well, achieve their dreams, to become the best players they can be. But more importantly, even if that doesn’t work out, help them be the best person they can be, in terms of instilling discipline, hard work, a never give up attitude. Developing those types of things in their personality, that will help them in any endeavor in life that they might go into.”

Station’s book, which he says is approximately 95% complete, is titled, “Larry Station, Jr.; Taking it to the Next Level - - a Parent’s Guide to Developing Your Student-Athlete’s Potential. The book includes information on academic eligibility, NCAA requirements, recruiting process, parental advice and personal anecdotes and photos. His target date is to have the book available by September.

Living in Omaha, Station is also able to keep up with the Hawkeye football program. “I watch Iowa play football whenever I have the opportunity,” concluded Station. “I watched the Orange Bowl. That was a very awesome display of football talent and strategy.”

Spoken like a true Hall of Famer.