



Joe Schmidt

January 19, 1932 - September 11, 2024

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Joe Schmidt, the Detroit Lions linebacker and later head coach who helped invent the modern middle linebacker, died in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, on September 11, 2024. He was ninety-two.

Born Joseph Paul Schmidt in Pittsburgh on January 19, 1932, he starred at the University of Pittsburgh, then spent thirteen seasons in Detroit (1953-1965) winning championships in 1953 and 1957, stacking Pro Bowls, and earning a place on the NFL's 1950s All-Decade and 100th Anniversary teams. Hall of Fame induction came in 1973. As Lions head coach from 1967 to 1972 he went 43-34-7 and took the team to the 1970 playoffs - a defensive mind trying to rebuild a franchise that still wore his retired number 56.

After football he worked as a manufacturer's representative in the Detroit auto-supplier world, a second career as unflashy as a form tackle. Players and writers called him a defensive quarterback before the phrase was tired. He died in Florida far from Ford Field, but the city that watched him tackle still treats 56 as civic property.

He died in Palm Beach Gardens on September 11, 2024. The film study continues every Sunday he helped invent.

Schmidt's Lions teams tackled with a geometry that later coaches diagrammed and called innovation. He was already doing the job when the title "middle linebacker" still felt new. Coaching tested a different patience - drafts, press conferences, the slow climb back to .500 - and he left when the fun thinned, a rare honest exit. Pittsburgh roots and Detroit loyalty framed a Florida ending. Hall of Fame bronze is cold; the better memorial is every defensive signal-caller who still owes him a royalty in instinct.

Services

Died in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, on September 11, 2024. Pro Football Hall of Fame linebacker and former Detroit Lions head coach.

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