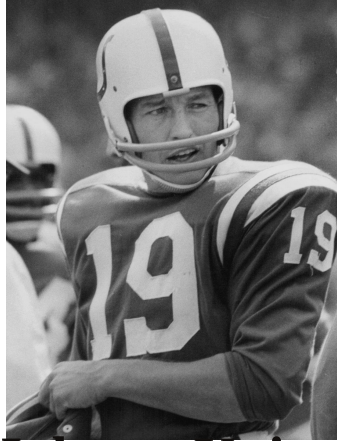




Johnny Unitas

May 7, 1933 - September 11, 2002

Towson, Maryland

Johnny Unitas, the Baltimore Colts quarterback whose high-tops and crew cut became shorthand for mid-century professional football, died of a heart attack at a hospital in Towson, Maryland, on September 11, 2002. He was sixty-nine.

Born John Constantine Unitas in Pittsburgh on May 7, 1933, he was cut by the Pittsburgh Steelers, played sandlot ball for six dollars a game, and then remade the National Football League from the pocket in Baltimore. From 1956 onward he threw with a patience that looked like daring: the 1958 championship overtime against the Giants, still called the greatest game, made Sunday television a national habit. He led the Colts to titles, stacked records that stood for decades, and treated the huddle as a classroom where receivers learned timing the hard way.

After football he stayed in Maryland, a civic fixture whose name went on stadium gates and whose opinion on the modern game was rarely soft. Admirers remembered the flat-top and the black high-tops; teammates remembered a quarterback who expected everyone else to be as stubborn as he was. The Pro Football Hall of Fame induction in 1979 merely ratified what Baltimore already knew.

He died in Towson on September 11, 2002. The arm that once moved a league is gone; the footage of that overtime still teaches what nerve looks like under lights.

Unitas did not invent the two-minute drill so much as he made it look inevitable. Receivers learned to break at the exact moment his eyes said go; defenses learned that sack totals did not cancel completions. Baltimore

claimed him the way port cities claim ships - by use, not by birth certificate. After retirement he could be tart about rule changes and soft pockets, but the film of 1958 still sells itself. On this anniversary Notice Nearby marks a quarterback whose fame never needed a nickname louder than his own.

Services

Died in Towson, Maryland, on September 11, 2002, after a heart attack. Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback; funeral Mass in Baltimore; buried at Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens in Timonium, Maryland.

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