



BY JOEL KELLER

For a football fan, meeting Bart Oates is an interesting experience. You know that Oates was a Pro Bowl center, so you expect to be greeted by a hulk of a man. You might also expect that he'd have the weathered and weary look of a person who spent the better part of his life fending off large men who were intent on knocking his running back or quarterback into the next week.

But the man in front of you cuts a different figure. Sure, he's tall, but he's slimmed down since his playing days. His silvering hair is neatly combed back. Impeccably dressed in a yellow golf shirt and charcoal grey dress slacks, he gives you a firm but warm handshake and a pleasant smile. In fact, if it weren't for the scars on his elbows, remnants of previous surgeries, you might think that Oates was just like any other lawyer, businessman or real estate agent that you would see in the vicinity of the Morris County Courthouse.

Here's the interesting part: he's all three and more.

"Offensive linemen have a very different mindset," says Oates, sitting in the conference room of All-Pro Title, LLC, where he is general counsel and principal partner. "Collectively, they're the least athletic guys on the team, but it's a very cerebral group."

It is that cerebral quality that has led Oates, who won Super Bowl championships with the 1986 and 1990 New York Giants and with the 1994 San Francisco 49ers, to a post-football career that few ex-players can claim. In addition to his work for the title corporation, the Harding resident is a director for Cohn Real Estate in Roseland, finding and fulfilling brokerage assignments for the firm. And now, one of his major philanthropic efforts is as the chairman of the board of the New Jersey Hall of Fame (see sidebar).

Unlike many players who leverage their money or fame into a lucrative career after they leave the field, Oates, 47, set the building blocks for

SEEING RED A bloody Oates, left, during a playoff game in 1990 against the Chicago Bears. Opposite page: These days, the attorney and businessman suits up in a shirt and tie.



FAMILY GUY The Oates family, from left, Derek, Bart, Michelle, Sklyer and Zack.

his post-sports career while he was still playing. Soon after he joined the Giants in 1985, fresh from two championships with the Philadelphia/Baltimore Stars of the defunct USFL, Oates began attending Seton Hall Law School.

Though he waited until the off-season to take the bulk of his class work, he did register for one or two classes during the season, which he found to be a great break from the rigors of the NFL. "For me, it was kind of refreshing to be able to go to class and sit there and study criminal procedure and constitutional law as opposed to, you know, thinking about Ride 25 and Float 37."

He graduated in 1990 and took the state bar exam during the first week of Giants training camp that July. When asked if that was one of the crazier weeks of his life, Oates jokes a little. "I can't remember anymore. Extreme pain and duress you put out of your mind," he laughs. "Yeah, it was. I remember coming in being exhausted, [it was] just so mentally taxing. But that Wednesday morning [after the exam], I'm practicing, with pads, full speed." He didn't find out he passed until that December. After passing the bar, he practiced law

every off-season until his 1996 retirement, specializing in personal injury law, contracts and tax law. Now he works mostly in the real estate business; he still practices law, but for a very limited number of clients.

Growing up in Georgia with five brothers and sisters, Oates and his family didn't have a lot, but his parents knew that education was important. A self-described "nerd" in high school, he was also a big kid. "So the coach grabs me and says, 'Son, you're playing football for me.' And you're in the South, so when an adult talks to you, you say, 'Yes, sir!'" But he also knew that football was his only opportunity to go to college, which he was able to do via an athletic scholarship to Brigham Young University, where he received a degree in accounting.

The importance of education was not the only value instilled on Oates as he grew up. As a member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, he was taught that service to the community was equally important. As a young adult, he did missionary work for the LDS in Nevada, and he continues to volunteer his time to a number of organizations, including the United Way and the Boy Scouts of America.

Oates has extended his sense of duty to his daughter and two sons he has with his wife, Michelle. Derek, 23, just completed a stint in the Army, which included a tour in Iraq with the 82nd Airborne. And Zack, 20, is nearing the end of a two-year Mormon missionary assignment in the Ukraine. "Think about taking a 19, 20 year old guy, and he's basically not even thinking about himself. Two years, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and he can only call his parents twice a year. It's a huge commitment," says Oates.

Of course, Oates doesn't forget his football days; in his office at All-Pro Title hang pictures of him with his Giants and Niners championship teams, and he's still good friends with former teammates such as Steve Young, Brent Jones, Bill Ard, Phil Simms and Jim Burt.

The lessons learned from every aspect of his life have made him what he is today. And he understands that being a former player helps him in his charitable endeavors: "I know being here in this area, and having been a part of some very successful football teams, it's given me a platform in some small way to be able to do something positive." ■

GETTING THE HALL ROLLING

A bill creating the New Jersey Hall of Fame was signed into law by acting governor Richard Codey in September 2005. The mission of the Hall of Fame is to honor people who were born and/or lived in the state that made, in the words of the organization's Web site, "invaluable contributions to society and the world beyond."

Expert panels will choose nominees from amongst the ranks of the famous and non-famous, and, while Chairman of the Board Bart Oates of Harding thinks the first inductee class is going to be obvious — think Springsteen, Edison and Einstein — he wants to make sure the

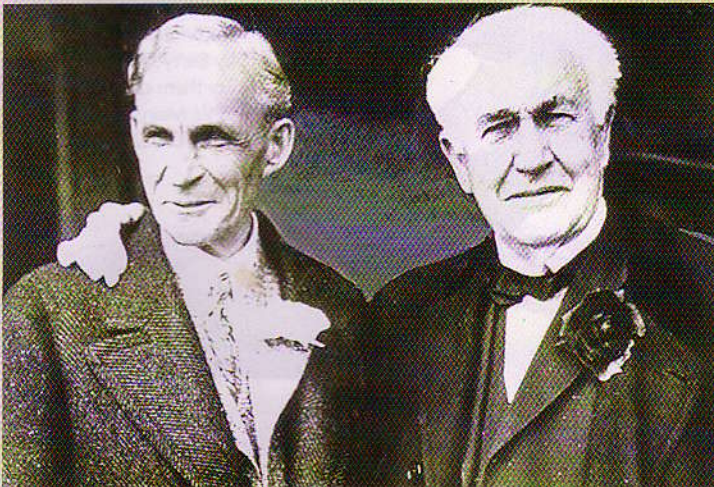
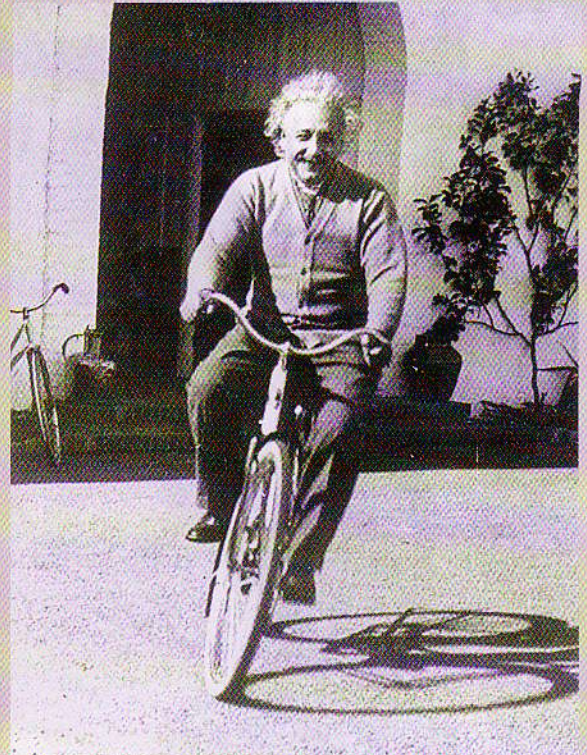
Hall honors as many deserving people as possible. "We want to get a mix, geographical, from very diverse backgrounds," Oates says. "We want this to be inclusive, to represent the constituency and population of the state."

The categories for nominees will be: Historical, General (military, government and religion), Enterprise (science, technology and business), Sports and Arts & Entertainment. There will also be a "lifetime achievement" award that will honor a person that may not be well-known, but has distinguished him- or herself in the community in which they work or volunteer.

The nominees will be announced by Gov. Jon Corzine and the vote for the finalists will be open to the public at the New Jersey Hall of Fame Web site (www.njhalloffame.com) and through paper ballots available at supermarkets and other public places. "We want everyone to be a part of this. This is not like an Academy-type thing; this is a people's choice, where this will be open to the public so they can have their say," says Oates.

An awards ceremony is scheduled for the fall of 2007 and a museum is in the works.

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WHO CAN IT BE NOW? Clockwise from above left: Thomas Edison — pictured with his arm around Henry Ford — Bruce Springsteen, Albert Einstein and Harriet Tubman are some of the New Jerseyans who may be inducted into the first class of the NJ Hall of Fame in 2007; As acting governor, Richard Codey signed a bill creating the New Jersey Hall of Fame in 2005.