

Blue Streaks in the Pros



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John Carroll has extended its reach beyond the borders of collegiate football. The Jesuit University of Cleveland is making a name for itself in the National Football League.

Former Blue Streak linebacker London Fletcher made a name for himself in the NFL, completing 16 seasons in the league and seven with the Redskins before retiring at the end of the 2013 season.

In 2012, a year in which he was named to his third Pro Bowl, Fletcher received the Bart Starr Award, given annually to the NFL player who best exemplifies leadership and outstanding character in the home, on the field and in the community.

As the starting middle linebacker for the St. Louis Rams, Fletcher appeared in two Super Bowls. He posted a team-high nine tackles in a thrilling 23-16 victory over the Tennessee Titans in Super Bowl XXXIV. He also made five tackles in the Rams 20-17 loss to New England in Super Bowl XXXVI.

Fletcher was a 3-year letterwinner for the Blue Streaks (1995-97). He was a first team All-American selection in 1996 and 1997, as well as Football Gazette's Division III Linebacker of the Year in 1997. That year, Fletcher set a school record for tackles in a season with 202.

When Fletcher took to the field for Super Bowl XXXIV, he became the first John Carroll alumnus to play in an NFL championship game in 40 years. The last Blue Streak to do so was Carl Taseff, class of 1951, who played on the Baltimore Colts' back-to-back NFL Championship teams in 1958 and 1959.

Fletcher is part of a distinguished list of Blue Streaks who have performed in regular season pro competition.

Graham Armstrong (class of 1941) played for the Cleveland Rams of the NFL in 1941 and 1945 (NFL champions that year), and the Buffalo Bills of the AAFC in 1946-47. He played in 36 games over four years, playing a variety of positions including placekicker. He made 23 of his 27 extra points during his four-year pro career.

Ed Ecker (class of 1944) began his career with the Chicago Bears in 1947, then played for the Chicago Rockets of the AAFC in 1948. After a year off in 1949, Ecker played with the Green Bay Packers in 1950-51 before concluding his career with the Washington Redskins in 1952.



Tom Lahey (class of 1941) had a brief stint with the Chicago Rockets of the AAFC in 1946 and 1947, playing end.

Burrell Shields (class of 1952) also played two seasons in the NFL as a back, hooking on with the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1954 and the Baltimore Colts in 1955.

Don Shula (class of 1951) had a much bigger impact as a head coach in the NFL, but his career as a player spanned seven seasons. He started with the Cleveland Browns in 1951-52, moved to the Baltimore Colts in 1953-56, and concluded with Washington in 1957.

Gene Stringer (class of 1925) played for the original Cleveland Bulldogs in 1925. Stringer was listed as playing five positions: halfback, fullback, tackle, quarterback and end.

Carl Taseff (class of 1951) had the most successful career in the pro ranks of any Blue Streak up to this point. Originally a halfback, Taseff made his name as a defensive back. He made 20 interceptions over 11 pro seasons, starting with the Cleveland Browns in 1951. From 1953-61 he played with the



powerhouse Baltimore Colts. He wound up his career by playing with the Philadelphia Eagles in 1961 and Buffalo of the AFL in 1962.

Taseff's banner season was 1958, when he made seven interceptions for the storied NFL champion Colts. He played and started in the legendary 1958 NFL championship game when the Colts edged the New York Giants in overtime.

In more recent years, quarterbacks from John Carroll have received NFL and CFL attention. Larry Wanke (class of 1992) was a 1991 draft choice for the New York Giants. P.J. Insana (class of 1995) signed a free agent contract with the British Columbia Lions of the Canadian Football League in 1995.

Tom Arth (class of 2003) spent two seasons with the Indianapolis Colts as well as two spring seasons in NFL Europe with teams in Scotland and Germany. He also played one year in the Arena Football League with the Grand Rapids Rampage. Arth enters his second season as the head coach at his alma mater in 2014.

John Carroll's impact in the NFL is not limited to players. Three JCU graduates – Taseff, Gary Stevens, and Silvio Cornachione – served at one time or another on Shula's staff with the Dolphins.

Another JCU grad, Dick Walker, was a member of the Pittsburgh Steelers staff that won back-to-back Super Bowls in 1978 and 1979. He also was part of Woody Hayes' staff at Ohio State from 1969 to 1976, appearing in five Rose Bowls and one Orange Bowl. He was inducted into the JCU Hall of Fame in 2006.

Chuck Priefer, a 1962 graduate of John Carroll, spent four decades as a college and professional coach. He was renowned as a special teams coach, sending several of his charges to the Pro Bowl. Included in his resume are a collegiate championship as a member of Georgia Tech's staff in 1990, and a Super Bowl XXIX appearance with San Diego Chargers.

Nick Caserio and Josh McDaniels, both of whom played for JCU in the late 1990's, were part of three Super Bowl wins and four Super Bowl appearances with New England Patriots.

Caserio has remained with the Patriots, occupying the top spot in the personnel department as Director of Player Personnel. McDaniels is back with the Patriots as offensive coordinator after spending time as a head coach with the Denver Broncos.

Another NFL team also has a John Carroll grad as its "OC", as Greg Roman (class of 1995) holds that position with the San Francisco 49ers. Roman helped lead his 49ers to an appearance in Super Bowl XLVII against the Baltimore Ravens in 2013.

Three former Blue Streaks were employed by the Super Bowl XLI champion Indianapolis Colts at the time of their win in administrative roles -- Chris Polian, Tom Telesco, and David Caldwell. Currently, Telesco is the General Manager of the San Diego Chargers, while Caldwell is the General Manager of the Jacksonville Jaguars. Polian joined Caldwell in Jacksonville and is now Director of Pro Personnel.

Polian's brother, Brian, is currently in his second year as head coach at the University of Nevada.

Ben Milsom (class of 2001) has also risen in the ranks of an NFL organization, as he is now Director of Sales for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, while David Ziegler (class of 2000), after several years as a pro scout for the Denver Broncos, has joined the personnel department for New England.

Ken O'Keefe (class of 1975), who served for over a decade as the offensive coordinator at the University of Iowa, joined the Miami Dolphins in 2012 as the wide receivers coach.

