



MARK THOMAS

Class of 1972

Mark Thomas used the skills he learned playing football in achieving success in two very different careers, first as a football coach and for the past 23 years, in sales in the aviation industry.

His decorated football playing career started at Elizabeth Forward High School and led to distinctive experiences at the highest levels of college football. Throughout his journey, he was supported by a large family with roots in the McKeesport and Elizabeth areas that date back to his great grandparents. He spent many summers with his great grandparents in Liberty Borough.

Thomas was born at the Ohio State University Medical Center in Columbus, OH, in October 1954 to his late parents, Richard and Iris Thomas. His father's tour with the Air Force landed them in Columbus. The family moved to the Elizabeth area in 1956. His two siblings, Scott and Diane, were born after they moved here. They were all raised in the Blaine Hill area.

Between the Wylie School for first grade and the Bunola School for second, Thomas has a number of early life memories that tie him to EF. From eighth grade on, he participated on the basketball, track & field, baseball and football teams at EF. He earned letters in all four sports during his four years in high school. Thomas was elected team captain of both the football and basketball team during his senior year. He was voted EFHS athlete of the year in 1972. This was accomplished under the leadership of two infamous EF coaches, George Hays (football) and Wally Gibbons (basketball).

Thomas was selected to the District 4 all-conference (Big Ten) basketball team when he ranked fifth in the conference in scoring with 19 points per game. However, football was his passion, and his senior year was busy. The team finished 6-1 in 1972 with Thomas catching 15 of the 16 total passes thrown by the team that season for three touchdowns and over 300 yards in the Warriors' wishbone offense. He was selected to the all-conference (Big Ten) team as both a tight end and linebacker and to the All-State team. He was the starting tight end in the prestigious Big33 game versus Ohio.

Heavily recruited as a tight-end/linebacker, Thomas receiving 30+ Division I scholarship offers and took seven college visits. He ended up opting for Penn State over Notre Dame, Michigan State and Pitt. After seeing his capabilities on the freshman team, Joe Paterno decided to move him to right guard on the offensive line, a position he had never played. He played in every game at right guard for the Penn State in its 1973 National Championship run. His junior and senior years, he was the starter at that position. During his time at Happy Valley, the football team had a record of 44-7 and played in four New Year's Day bowl game, the Sugar twice and the Rose and Cotton. After graduating with a degree in Health, Physical Education & Recreation, he was given an opportunity with the Atlanta Falcons, but it was short-lived due to health reasons.

Thomas began pursuing his passion in coaching football at Bethel Park from 1976-1978. He then was given a graduate assistant coaching job under Bobby Bowden at Florida State from 1979-1981. His first daughter, Katie, was born in Tallahassee with his then wife, Kim. Thomas's coaching career took off from there. He subsequently coaching under Frank Beamer (1982-1984) at Murray State, under Steve Sloan (1985-1986) at Duke then under two coaches at the University of Tulsa from 1987-1999. He went from a graduate assistant earning permanent positions as offensive line coach and later offensive coordinator. Thomas had three more children along the way: Ricky (Murray), Karrie (Murray) and Mitch (Tulsa). He consistently recruited Pennsylvania during his career with 17 players making it to the NFL. EF graduates Dan Tarabella and Drew Poskon played for him at Tulsa.

After deciding to retire from coaching in 2000, Thomas told the bold step and reinvented himself by entering the aviation industry where he had very little background in either aviation or engineering. For the past six years, he has Senior Director of Sales for Aviation Technical Services, generating over \$25 million in revenue for this airplane component repair company. Throughout his time in the aviation industry, he has drawn many parallels from his football and coaching experiences dating all the way back to EF and is referred to as 'Coach' by many in the industry.

He currently resides in Tulsa, OK, with his dear wife De and remains a football enthusiast.