



All-American guard John Wooten will be inducted into the College Football Hall Of Fame in December

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



John Wooten Named To College Football Hall Of Fame

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BOULDER — **Juanita Wooten** won't have a problem finding a birthday present for her husband this year; she will just have to accompany him to the honor of a lifetime the day before he turns 76 this December.

John Wooten, the All-American guard for the University of Colorado in the mid-to-late 1950s, has been selected by the National Football Foundation's Honors Court for induction into the College Football Hall of Fame this December 4 in New York City. He will join 13 other players and three coaches in the Class of 2012 (*see list at end of story*).

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He will become the sixth Buffalo enshrined in the Hall, joining **Byron White** (inducted in 1952), **Joe Romig** (1984), **Dick Anderson** (1993), **Bobby Anderson** (2006) and **Alfred Williams** (2010). Like White and Romig, Wooten played in the platoon era of the sport and excelled at offensive guard along with playing defensive tackle.



John Wooten will be Colorado's sixth College Hall of Fame member.

"I always felt that I made a great decision to go to Colorado, I had a great time, and forged many relationships which still exist today," Wooten said. When an honor like this comes, it makes you reflect on all things that have happened across your life, and it makes you happy. I just smile at how great the good Lord has blessed me. My wife told me this is 'Your great birthday present for number 76'."

"This is something I never dreamed of," he continued. "I can truthfully say that it never really entered my mind that someday it could happen. I looked every year when the new inductees were announced to see who made it, and had such a great feeling for the guys who I played against and knew of their great careers. It is difficult to believe that I am privileged to receive such an honor, but I am totally thrilled."

"We had some real fine players and some really good teams," Wooten said of the CU squads in the mid-to-late 1950s. So

many outstanding players and leaders – Boyd Dowler, Bob Stransky, Wally Merz, Bob Salerno, the Stapp (Dick and Bob) brothers, John Bayuk, Bill Mondt – I could go on and on. I just played hard, did all I could to help us win. I felt very good about my career."

After earning All-State honors in football and basketball at Carlsbad (N.M.) High School, he arrived on the Colorado campus in the fall of 1955, just the second black player in the program's history, joining **Frank Clarke** who blazed the trail just one season before. Freshmen were ineligible to play at the time, so he went on to letter in the 1956, 1957 and 1958 seasons; he earned pre- and postseason (AFCA) All-America honors as a senior after garnering All-Big 7 Conference and UPI honorable mention All-America honors his junior season. He is believed to be one of the first African-Americans to earn All-America honors playing a position in the interior line. Colorado was 20-9-2 in his three years as a starter in the trenches, and he played in the 1959 Chicago All-Star game versus National Football League players.

Nicknamed the "Sun Devil" early in his CU career ("I like the sun and I try to be a regular devil out there on the football field," he said at the time), Wooten earned the starting spot at left guard for his very first varsity game in the late **Dal Ward's** single-wing offense. Considered big in size for the day, he was a 6-foot-2, 230-pound bulldozer on offense and a fierce hitter on defense. Reporters wrote not to worry about the left side of the offensive line, Wooten is there, while teams often geared their offensive attack away from Wooten's side of the defense.

Wooten would be selected as one of 25 members of CU's All-Century Team in 1989, honoring the school's first 100 years of intercollegiate football, and was a member of the fifth class to be inducted into Colorado's Athletic Hall of Fame, that honor coming in 2004. The following year, his jersey (#69) was officially honored and his name placed upon the façade of the **Fred Casotti** Press Box.

*(At CU, parking spots in the football coaches' lot are not marked with their names, but of those in the Athletic HOF; football coach **Jon Embree**, who has met Wooten on several occasions, selected his name for his spot. "That was an easy choice; John stands for so many great accomplishments. It is an honor to pull in that spot and see his name every day.")*



John Wooten (69) shows off his skill to coach Dal Ward and linemates Bill Mondt (66) and Sherman Pruitt (67).

Individual statistics for offensive linemen were not kept in those days, but during the three years he lettered, Colorado ranked 12th (1956, 252.1 yards per game), first

(322.4) and fifth (249.5) nationally in rushing offense; in '57, CU was second overall in total offense (415.2 ypg). In the latter, he blocked for the nation's second leading rusher, **Bob Stransky**, who amassed 1,097 yards in 10 games. The late Casotti, longtime sports information director and CU historian, summarized his play as such: *"Wooten was a quick, agile tackle who provided bone-crunching lead blocks for one of the nation's top offensive teams during his collegiate career."*

"This is just great, I am so happy for him," Stransky said. "He's a great guy. We were really close in college. He gave it 100 percent all the time and was a good blocker at a key position, pulling guard in our single-wing offense. He led most of our running plays."

While Colorado did not win a conference title in his three seasons as a player (the Buffaloes played second fiddle to Bud Wilkinson's great Oklahoma teams), he lists CU's 27-21 win over Clemson in the 1957 Orange Bowl as his second best memory from his time in Boulder. He and Clarke are believed to be among, if not the, first blacks to appear in the game, and as was unfortunately common at the time, were treated by some that they just did not belong and even were not permitted to attend a couple of team functions in town. But there were no problems with the CU contingent or the Clemson team.

His top memory?

Graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education in June of '59. "I am the youngest of six, raised by a single parent, and I was the only one to go to college. Many people didn't march back then, they just said 'Mail me the diploma.' But that was a big accomplishment for me considering the odds against me, and I wanted my mom (Henrietta) there to watch me walk across the stage in the stadium. It is one of the best memories in my life, not just at CU."

Growing up in Carlsbad, Wooten attended segregated schools through the 9th grade, schools that didn't have enough students to field football if hardly any athletic teams. He thought he'd be destined to attend a segregated high school, with the 1954 Civil Rights Act (Brown vs. the Board of Education) that mandated schools had to start integrating still two years away.



Wooten (69) gets set to block for Howard Cook (21) against Kansas State in 1958.

"Our superintendent (**Tom Hansen**), principal (**Guy Waid**) and football coach (**Ralph Bowyer**), they took it upon themselves to go the students at Carlsbad High School and asked them if they would be willing to accept Negroes in high school at that time," Wooten recalled. "And they said yes. Otherwise I would have gone to a segregated high school and probably wouldn't have made it anywhere. That gave me the opportunity to play football; my first time was as a sophomore in 1952.

"It's not like Coach Bowyer saw us playing and he wanted us (blacks) for our athletic talents. He and the others did what they thought was right. In Coach Bowyer, you saw (Dallas Cowboys) Coach **Tom Landry**. They were very similar men.

They never hooped or hollered, no cursing, treated you with total respect. If Coach Bowyer was mad, he'd yell, 'Get the dang lead out.' Those were the harshest words you ever heard him say. When I was with Dallas, I had Coach Bowyer come over and spend a weekend with us because I wanted those two to meet. That was a special occasion getting them together."

Recruiting was different in the 1950s, especially for African-Americans. He was courted by Dartmouth, Florida A&M, UCLA, New Mexico and New Mexico State. Dartmouth had an allure to it, being an Ivy League school, but that was too far away for his mother; after all, New Hampshire and New Mexico are only close alphabetically.

So why did he choose the University of Colorado?

"Hugh Davidson, our freshman football coach, recruited me to Colorado," Wooten said. "My mom just loved him, and really it came down to him and my mom being the main reasons I chose CU. She told me over and over, 'John, this is where I want you to go. Coach Davidson is such a good person. I know you'll be in great hands.' I thought my mom had great judgment of character and really knew people. Whatever she felt and saw in Coach Davidson I trusted in her as to where I should go. The minute he walked in our house, we knew. And once I saw the outstanding campus, there was no turning back."

Davidson also coached at Montana and Idaho before entering a long career in professional scouting, spending over 20 years working for the Denver Broncos. In recruiting, Davidson, now 84 and retired in Hamilton, Mont., covered the west, in particular California, Arizona and New Mexico as well as the Chicago area for Dal Ward.

"Between the three of us, we all made a great choice for me. Colorado was like my second family. Back in those days, we couldn't go home for Thanksgiving. Fred Casotti, his wife and children always had us over for Thanksgiving dinner. Having us to his home was gratifying; I can still remember playing with his kids, tumbling around on the floor with them. When I look at people like Coach Davidson, Fred Casotti, Jane Ward (Dal's wife), they were all really good to us. Nice, nice people."

"It wasn't very easy back then to get to Boulder from Carlsbad, not sure it is now," Wooten said of the pre-Interstate highway days. "We had to go north up through Roswell, turn off at Cline's Corner, and then we had to go over Raton Pass to pick up the main road into Colorado."

"I am honored to have had the opportunity to be associated with John starting almost 60 years ago and continuing to this day, and he's tops as far as I'm concerned," Davidson said. "This honor explains it for itself, it is very deserving. He was not only a productive player, he has always been a tremendous gentleman and a great representative for CU and his stops thereafter."

Davidson saw John's name on the usual listing for All-Stars for state high school players. "I had the help of a local judge in locating and making contact with the family," he recalled. "His mom was very positive, a lovely lady, and John was a very good student. I knew we'd welcome him in Boulder if he wanted to come, and the interest was mutual right from the start." Wooten's position coach at Colorado was the late **Marshall Wells**.



Wooten as a member of the Cleveland Browns.

Drafted by Cleveland in the fifth round of the 1959 National Football League Draft (the 53rd overall pick), he was fortunate enough to join the Browns at a time when they were considered one of the top two or three franchises in professional football. He would play nine seasons in Cleveland, all at left guard, within a span where it posted a winning record 13 consecutive years. The Browns' 79-39-4 record in that time trailed only Green Bay (89-29-4) and basically matched Baltimore (80-39-3) for supremacy in the NFL.

Wooten's Browns defeated the Colts and its bevy of future Hall of Famers, 27-0, to win the 1964 NFL Championship; they returned to the title game a year later but lost to the Packers, 23-12. He was named to the *Sporting News* NFL All Star Team in 1965 and garnered All-Pro honors the next two seasons and played in the Pro Bowl (1966-67); in 1979, he was named to the Browns All-Time All-Star Team and in 2010, he was inducted into the team's Ring of Honor.

Wooten, of course, had the distinction of lining up to block for the great Jim Brown, widely regarded among the top two or three running backs in pro football history. He led the NFL in rushing for six of the seven seasons Wooten served as one his blockers, and was the NFL most valuable player in 1965 with 1,544 yards, the third most yards in league history at the time (and he owned the other two) and a league-best 21 touchdowns.

"The thing was that going to Cleveland, with the history of the Browns back in those days, to go there, and be in

that huddle and be standing next to guys like the great Lou Groza (left tackle) and the great Jim Brown, and realize that you were playing with these men," Wooten recalled. "I never dreamed that one day I would be playing in the NFL, much less on a team with pro Hall of Fame members next to you.

"To have that opportunity to go in there and play, and then in '64 to beat one of the great teams in NFL history to win the title makes me feel all the more blessed," he continued. "They were favored to be beat us by three touchdowns, but we shut out that great offensive machine that included Johnny Unitas, John Mackey, Raymond Berry and others. To beat them 27-0 has always been a great memory and is something that stays with you forever."

Wooten added, "I still think Unitas is the best quarterback ever, several other guys were great, but they weren't Johnny U."

While a member of the Browns, he put his CU Education degree to use, as during the off seasons of 1960 through 1963, he was a teacher at Addison Junior High School in Cleveland. Wooten finished out his career with the Washington Redskins, retiring from the game after the 1968 season.

After his playing days, Wooten worked as a sports agent and then entered into administration in pro football. He was the Director of Pro Scouting with the Dallas Cowboys for 17 years (1975-91), again one of the first African-Americans to be named to that position. In 1991, he went to work for the NFL, creating player and player development programs which included financial planning, family assistance and continuing education, until the Philadelphia Eagles named him Vice President for Player Personnel the following year, one of the first personnel directors in league history to hold a VP title.

In 1998, he returned to where he started – sort of – he served as the Assistant Director of Pro & College Scouting for the Baltimore Ravens until his retirement in 2003; Baltimore, of course, lured the Cleveland Brown franchise east in 1995 after the city had lost its team, the Colts, to Indianapolis a decade earlier.

Wooten has now been involved with the NFL as a player and administrator for over five decades, and since 2003, has served as the Chairman of the Fritz Pollard Alliance, an affinity group who works in conjunction with the NFL as it relates to minority hiring in coaching, scouting and front office positions. He is also the President of Wooten Printing, Inc., in Dallas, and was inducted into the Texas Black Sports Hall of Fame in 2002.

"All along the way, I had hundreds of people help me, Wooten said. "That's why the Fritz Pollard organization is so important, it's about giving back." The foundation's namesake, Pollard, was the first African-American to coach in the NFL. But Wooten has always had a deep commitment to the communities in which he has lived and thus has valued always giving back.



Wooten joined the Colorado Athletic Hall of Fame in 2004.

He has served on the Board of Directors of Big Brothers in Cleveland, where he was also a member of the City Planning Commission; he was the recipient of the City of Cleveland's William O. Walker Community Excellence Award in 2002. He also was a member of the National Minority Economic Development Council under President Lyndon Johnson's administration.

He was born December 5, 1936 in Riverview, Texas, but grew up in Carlsbad, located in southeastern New Mexico and about 150 miles northeast of El Paso. Currently a resident of Arlington, Texas, he has three children, Gina, Lynette, and John David, and has three grandchildren, Lauren, Gabriel and Michael.

Colorado will honor Wooten this fall with traditional On-Campus Salute for incoming Hall of Fame inductees at

the Arizona State game, which will be nationally televised from Folsom Field on Thursday night, October 11.

In addition to Wooten, other members of the class are TB Charles Alexander, LSU (1975-78), HB Otis Armstrong, Purdue (1970-72), QB Steve Bartkowski, California (1972-74), SE Hal Bedsole, USC (1961-63), TE Dave Casper Notre Dame (1971-73), QB Ty Detmer, BYU (1988-91), QB Tommy Kramer, Rice (1973-76), WR Art Monk, Syracuse (1976-79), DB Greg Myers, Colorado State (1992-95), OT Jonathan Ogden, UCLA (1992-95), DT Gabe Rivera, Texas Tech (1979-82), LB Mark Simoneau, Kansas State (1996-99) and S Scott Thomas, Air Force (1982-85). The three coaches entering are Phillip Fulmer (Tennessee), Jimmy Johnson (Oklahoma State/Miami) and R.C. Slocum (Texas A&M).

SHOW MENU



Air Force, CU, CSU alums picked for College Football Hall of Fame

The Denver Post staff The Denver Post

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For the first time in its history, the College Football Hall of Fame has a player from Colorado, Colorado State and Air Force in an induction class in the same year.

As a bonus, a former Broncos tailback who led the NFL in rushing in 1974 also was named to the Hall's 2012 class, which was announced Tuesday.

The National Football Foundation selected former Colorado State defensive back Greg Myers, former Colorado guard John Wooten and former Air Force safety Scott Thomas to the 2012 class. Also in the class is Otis Armstrong, the Broncos' first-round pick in the 1973 draft out of Purdue.

"I'm a little surprised," Armstrong said Tuesday when reached at his home in Centennial. "I'm very excited. It's a fantastic event; I'm looking forward to it."

The enshrinement ceremony for the class, which has 14 players and three coaches, is Dec. 4 at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York.

Myers, a CSU star from Windsor, was a two-time All-American and won the Jim Thorpe Award in 1995 as the nation's best defensive back.

"This is a huge honor for me and a huge honor for Colorado State," Myers said Tuesday. "Reality hasn't sunk in completely. It's a humbling experience. It brought back a bunch of great memories."

As a CSU senior, Myers led the NCAA with 555 punt return yards and three punt return touchdowns. He also set a Western Athletic Conference record with 1,332 career punt return yards. As a defensive back, he had 295 tackles and 15 interceptions.

Myers played five seasons in the NFL, then began a career in the medical field. He now is an anesthesiologist at Denver Health Medical Center. He will join consensus All-American Thurman "Fum" McGraw and former CSU coach Earle Bruce in the Hall.

Wooten, who played for CU from 1956-58, was selected by the veterans committee. He was one of the first African-Americans to earn All-America honors as a lineman, in 1958. He becomes the sixth Buffalo in the Hall.

"When an honor like this comes, it makes you reflect on all things that have happened across your life and it makes you happy," Wooten said in a news release from CU. "I just smile at how great the good Lord has blessed me. My wife told me this is 'your great birthday present for number 76.' "

Wooten played 10 seasons in the NFL and was a two-time all-pro. He is chairman of the Fritz Pollard Alliance Foundation, which works to promote diversity in NFL coaching, front office and scouting staffs.

Thomas was an Air Force safety from 1982-85. As a consensus All-American his senior season, Thomas returned a punt, a kickoff and an interception for touchdowns as the Falcons went 12-1 and were No. 5 in the final rankings.

"It's nice to be recognized, especially for things that were done at the Air Force Academy. Our students are truly student-athletes," Thomas said. "It's a humbling experience for me to be listed among all those great college football players."

Thomas said he received notice of his induction in a package that contained a football. He becomes the fourth AFA product in the Hall of Fame, joining lineman Brock Strom, defensive tackle Chad Hennings and coach Fisher DeBerry. Thomas is a commercial pilot now and a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force reserves.

Armstrong was a halfback at Purdue from 1970-72 and an All-American. He played eight seasons for the Broncos, including in Super Bowl XII.

"I thought about my days in the black and gold, playing our nemesis in Notre Dame and Indiana," Armstrong said. "One of my biggest memories is my last game at Purdue, we played Indiana and we won big and I had a great day, a career day."

John Wooten, former CU Buff, to be inducted into College Football Hall of Fame

By Kyle Ringo, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The University of Colorado received a nice surprise today when the National Football Foundation announced another former Buff has earned induction into the College Football Hall of Fame.

John Wooten's name was not on this year's ballot, but he had been nominated in the past by the school, and the NFF Honors Court gave Wooten its seal of approval 54 years after he played his final snap for the Buffs.

Wooten was the second black player to play at Colorado and he became a standout offensive lineman earning first-team All-Big Seven Conference honors as a junior in 1957 and All-America honors from the American Football Coaches' Association as a senior in 1958.

Wooten went on to a long career in the NFL, first as a player with the Cleveland Browns and Washington Redskins and later as a player personnel director and an administrator in the league office.

Steve Hatchell, CEO and president of the NFF and a CU alum, had the pleasure of informing Wooten of the good news in a telephone call. Wooten, 75, makes his home in Arlington, Texas.

"I always felt that I made a great decision to go to Colorado, I had a great time, and forged many relationships which still exist today," Wooten said in a story published on the school's website. "When an honor like this comes, it makes you reflect on all things that have happened across your life, and it makes you happy. I just smile at how great the good Lord has blessed me. My wife told me this is 'Your great birthday present for number 76.'"

Wooten is the sixth CU player to earn induction into the College Football Hall of Fame, joining Byron "Whizzer" White, Joe Romig, Dick Anderson, Bobby Anderson and Alfred Williams. He is the first offensive lineman in the group.

Former CU coach Bill McCartney and guard Joe Garten were on this year's ballot but did not receive enough votes. It might be two years before either has a chance for induction again because the NFF has an unofficial policy of not inducting representatives of the same program in consecutive years.

Wooten, who came to CU from Carlsbad, N.M., will officially be inducted during the NFF awards ceremony in New York in December. He will be enshrined in the hall in the summer of 2013.