

## **Professor Finds Bronx Lore In NFL**

**By Jessica Bloch**

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Many football fans watching the Super Bowl in January cheered for either Green Bay or New England. Vic Mastro rooted for the Bronx.

Mastro is a Fordham University and Hudson Community College math professor. But his real expertise is Bronx football arcana. Mastro may be the world's only Bronx football specialist.

"I just watch and try to find Bronx connections," Mastro said.

He's got hundreds. Foremost, of course, is the late legendary Green Bay coach Vince Lombardi, who got his football start as one of the Fordham Rams' defensive linemen whom sportswriter Grantland Rice immortalized as the "Seven Blocks of Granite."

There were 12 to 15 Bronx connections in Super Bowl XXXI alone. Bill Parcels' own mentor, for example, was former Horace Mann School basketball coach Mickey Corcoran. Parcels is the former coach of the New York Giants, whose owner Wellington Mara grew up in the Bronx. The list goes on. And on and on.

Mastro, 48, is married and has one son. He grew up in Belmont where he watched the Giants practice under then-assistant coaches Lombardi and Tom Landry, who went on to coach the Dallas Cowboys.

Mastro traces his passion for Bronx football to the day the Giants lost in sudden-death overtime to the Baltimore Colts, then led by Johnny Unitas. Unitas may have forgotten that game. Mastro never did.

"I was broken-hearted," he said, "but the cement was put together in my story with football."

Mastro never played college football for Fordham, but played a variety of positions for the Fordham Prep team. He attended all the games and read voraciously about football. Eventually Mastro wrote down all the Bronx football connections he could remember.

In the 1980s, Mastro said he grew dissatisfied writing only mathematics texts and journal articles and directed his research skill toward football.

"As an academic I was a little angry with myself," he said. "I had published math book reviews but I didn't have anything in a different field. I wanted to write about football."

Three years later Mastro wrote a book-length treatise, "The Bronx: A Birthplace of NFL Legend and Lore," sections of which have been published in the Bronx Historical Society and NFL Hall of Fame newsletters. He estimates that about 30 of his pieces on Bronx football history have been published. "I started to do research and I uncovered everything," he said. "It was scary."

It wasn't scary to Bob Carroll, executive director of the Professional Football Researchers Association, who said researchers like Mastro are rare.

"I wish I had a million of them all over the country," Carroll said.

Mastro doesn't stop at Bronx connections; he does subsets as well. He catalogs Italian-American NFL players, African-American players and, even Bronx players who have gone on to Hollywood fame, such as Frank Gifford, Burt Lancaster and James Caan. His plans for research include Irish, American Indian, Polish, Jewish and Armenians and their links to football and the Bronx.

"If that's not integration, I don't know what is," he said.

Mastro said he didn't care who won the Super Bowl as long as the teams had Bronx connections. "That way I can keep up the story line," he said.