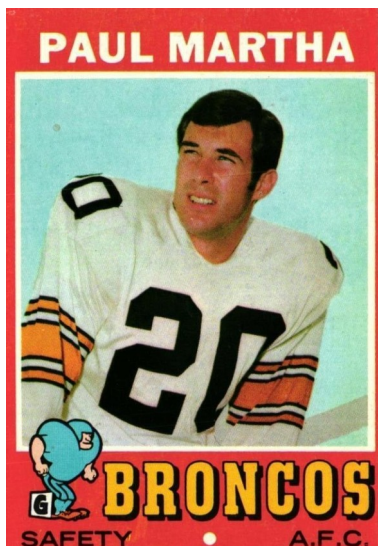


Paul Martha

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

On and off the gridiron, John Paul Martha was all business. His high degree of focus and dedication garnered him a reputation as a solid playmaker spanning his entire football career. Martha was a versatile two-way player at the University of Pittsburgh and for seven professional seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers (1964-1969) and Denver Broncos (1970).¹ Jim O'Brien, a college classmate of Martha's, and former sportswriter for the *Pittsburgh Press* said, "He always came up with the big play in the big games, and I guess that's what he's done here."²

Martha broke onto the scene in 1964 when he was selected in both the NFL and AFL drafts by the Steelers (10th overall) and the Buffalo Bills (69th overall), respectively. He chose to sign with the hometown Steelers, starring as a returner and defensive back. Standing at 6'0" and 187 pounds, he was built to fly all over the field.³ As a rookie he started two games at halfback, averaging over 24 yards per reception, returned 13 punts and a kickoff for a total of 247 all-purpose yards.



He switched to left end the next season, making six starts, recording 171 receiving yards.⁴ Unfortunately for Martha, the Steelers did not place a lot of talent around him, and the team was among the worst in the NFL during the mid to late 1960s. He played under four different coaches in his six seasons – Buddy Parker, Mike Nixon, Bill Austin, Chuck Noll – who won a combined 19 games over that span.⁵ He switched to defense full-time in



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1966 at free safety, opposite veteran Jim Bradshaw. He ranked second on the team with three interceptions, but Pittsburgh won just five games, yielding 347 points on defense.⁶

Martha continued to intercept passes, picking off four, three, and five passes over the next three seasons, respectively.⁷ Beginning in 1966, Marv Woodson started alongside him at left safety. Woodson recorded 15 interceptions from 1966 thru 1969, forming a formidable duo with Martha. Woodson led the Steelers with seven in 1967, earning Pro Bowl honors.⁸ Despite individual success, the Steelers set a franchise record in points allowed at 397 in 1968, resetting the mark in 1969 with 404. Their defensive efforts in 1968 and 1969 are the worst in franchise history for back-to-back seasons, sporting -153 and -186 point differentials, respectively.⁹

Among Martha's best career games was a contest on November 12, 1967 against the St. Louis Cardinals in St. Louis. The Pittsburgh defense forced three turnovers, including two interceptions by Martha that he returned for 41 yards.¹⁰ The following year in 1968 in a game against the Falcons, he picked off two Bob Berry passes that contributed to a 34-0 third-quarter lead. Pittsburgh went on to win, 41-21.¹¹ Martha's final season with Pittsburgh was the 1969 campaign. He started in all 14 games, recording five interceptions, recovering three fumbles.¹²

¹ "Paul Martha," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/M/MartPa20.htm>.

² Buchanan, Katy. "Personality Spotlight: Paul Martha," upi.com, November 16, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/16/Personality-Spotlight-Paul-Martha/6481406270800/>.

³ "Paul Martha," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/M/MartPa20.htm>.

⁴ "Paul Martha," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/M/MartPa20.htm>.

⁵ "Pittsburgh Steelers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/pit/>.

⁶ "Pittsburgh Steelers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/pit/>.

⁷ "Paul Martha," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/M/MartPa20.htm>.

⁸ "Marv Woodson," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WoodMa00.htm>.

⁹ "Pittsburgh Steelers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/pit/>.

¹⁰ "Pittsburgh Steelers at St. Louis Cardinals – November 12th, 1967," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/196711120crd.htm>.

¹¹ "Pittsburgh Steelers at Atlanta Falcons – November 3rd, 1968," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/196811030atl.htm>.

¹² "Paul Martha," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/M/MartPa20.htm>.



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Prior to the 1970 season, he was traded to the Denver Broncos for Walt Highsmith, Wallace Dickey, and a 1971 draft pick.¹³ With Pittsburgh, he played in 75 games, making 51 starts. He played just one season in Denver, serving as a veteran leader on the defense. Martha led the Broncos with six interceptions on Lou Saban's club that turned in a 5-8-1 mark.¹⁴ He announced his retirement following the season to pursue a career in law. During the off seasons with the Steelers, he studied at Duquesne University's law school, returning to Pittsburgh after his football career.

Martha worked as an NFL arbitrator for a number of years, working to resolve conflicts between the players and owners. His detail-oriented approach earned high praise from his colleagues, the local media, and former teammates.¹⁵ Steelers publicity director Joe Gordon complimented him, "He's a good person and has the ability to relate well to people ..."¹⁶ O'Brien also said of Martha's abilities, "The thing that struck me about Paul was that he was just a cut above all the other athletes in terms of having a sense of public relations. He was comfortable in conversations with adults and he had a certain sense of cockiness about him."¹⁷ As a result, Martha was able to come to resolutions over all player/owner conflicts he settled. Gordon commented, "When you're talking to him, he seems more interested in listening to you than in talking about himself, which I think is a unique quality in today's society."¹⁸ Martha also worked as an attorney for the Reed, Smith, and Shaw law firm in Pittsburgh. He was then approached by Edward DeBartolo to work in sports management. Martha seized the opportunity, becoming an executive vice president, general counsel, and CEO of the Pittsburgh Penguins in the late 1970s. He also worked in management with the San Francisco 49ers.¹⁹

Martha spent most of his life in the Pittsburgh area. He was born on June 22, 1942. He attended Shady Side Academy high school, playing on the football team.²⁰ Upon

- ¹ 3 "Paul Martha," prosportstransactions.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.prosportstransactions.com/football/Search/SearchResults.php?Player=martha&Team=&BeginDate=&EndDate=&PlayerMovementChkBx=yes&submit=Search>.
- ¹ 4 "Paul Martha," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/M/MartPa20.htm>.
- ¹ 5 Buchanan, Katy. "Personality Spotlight: Paul Martha," upi.com, November 16, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/16/Personality-Spotlight-Paul-Martha/6481406270800/>.
- ¹ 6 Buchanan, Katy. "Personality Spotlight: Paul Martha," upi.com, November 16, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/16/Personality-Spotlight-Paul-Martha/6481406270800/>.
- ¹ 7 Buchanan, Katy. "Personality Spotlight: Paul Martha," upi.com, November 16, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/16/Personality-Spotlight-Paul-Martha/6481406270800/>.
- ¹ 8 Buchanan, Katy. "Personality Spotlight: Paul Martha," upi.com, November 16, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/16/Personality-Spotlight-Paul-Martha/6481406270800/>.
- ¹ 9 Buchanan, Katy. "Personality Spotlight: Paul Martha," upi.com, November 16, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/16/Personality-Spotlight-Paul-Martha/6481406270800/>.
- ² 0 "Notable Alumni," shadysideacademy.org, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.shadysideacademy.org/alumni/featured-alumni/notable-alumni>.



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graduating in 1960, he attended the University of Pittsburgh where he was a star on both the basketball and football teams. Martha fully devoted his attention to football, playing quarterback in 1961, then moving to half back for the 1962 season.²¹ The Panthers went 5-5 in 1962, winning close games over California, UCLA, and Army. Martha pitched in close to 600 scrimmage yards and six total touchdowns.²² According to O'Brien, he earned the nickname, 'Rat,' "because of his narrow eyes and that look he can give you."²³

The Panthers had a tremendous 1963 campaign, finishing at 9-1.²⁴ Their only defeat was at the hands of Roger Staubach's Navy team, 24-12. Martha also saved his best performances for the big games. In the season opening win, a 20-0 defeat of UCLA, Martha recorded a touchdown saving play on an interception thrown by Pitt quarterback Fred Mazurek at the UCLA three-yard line.²⁵ Martha ran all the way from the opposite side of the field to catch the defender at the Pittsburgh 11-yard line, preventing a touchdown. In November in a contest against Notre Dame, Martha caught a 40-yard pass that set up a touchdown, leading to a 27-7 win.²⁶ The next week against Army, he scored a 48-yard rushing touchdown and tallied 105 yards on five attempts, part of a 359 yard rushing output that saw the Panthers roll, 28-0.²⁷ Despite being ranked in the top ten most of the season, incomprehensibly, they did not participate in a bowl game.

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, which resulted in a scheduling conflict for the Panthers. Their annual showdown with Penn State that was originally scheduled for November 23, was rescheduled for December 7.²⁸ The Panthers were hopeful of either a Cotton or Orange Bowl bid, but were chosen for the Sun Bowl. The selectors were uncertain whether Pitt would defeat Penn State and a two-loss Panthers team would not be an attractive option. Unhappy with the result, the university declined the bid.²⁹

¹ "Paul Martha," Sports-reference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/players/paul-martha-1.html>.

² "Paul Martha," Sports-reference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/players/paul-martha-1.html>.

³ Buchanan, Katy. "Personality Spotlight: Paul Martha," *upi.com*, November 16, 1982, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/11/16/Personality-Spotlight-Paul-Martha/6481406270800/>.

⁴ "1963 Pitt Panthers Schedule and Results," Sports-reference.com, accessed September 24, 2022, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/pittsburgh/1963-schedule.html>.

⁵ "QB Mazurek Guides 20-0 Triumph," *The Pittsburgh Press*, September 21, 1963, 6.

⁶ "Devore Loses Temper, Irish Bow to Panthers," *Reading Eagle*, November 10, 1963, 34.

⁷ "Pitt Wallops Army for No. 7," *Reading Eagle*, November 17, 1963, 37.

⁸ Von Benko, George. "Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team," *PittsburghSportsReport*, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022, <http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.

⁹ Von Benko, George. "Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team," *PittsburghSportsReport*, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022, <http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.



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Pitt wound up not playing in a bowl game, despite finishing at No. 4 in the final AP poll and did defeat Penn State, 22-21. Martha explained, “We wanted, to play Navy again. In those days and I shouldn't say this but the bowl games weren't that big; they weren't like they are now. We knew how good we were, we knew who we had beaten that year, and we just wanted to play one more team again, and that was Navy.”³⁰

This Pitt team is often known as the “No Bowl Team,” arguably the one of the greatest teams in college football history never to play in a bowl game. Of the players, 57 of them went on to graduate, 34 earned graduate degrees.³¹ Mazurek commented, “That's what I appreciate the most. We were both athletes and scholars.”³² The team is known as a special team in program history. The roster was almost all local talent. Martha recalled, “We had a good team. We had a lot of good football players, a lot of guys recruited out of high school and going on visits to the schools I had gone to Notre Dame, Duke, and Stanford. I knew we had a good team.”³³ Lineman John Maczuzak said, “Everybody was local. It won't happen again the way the game has evolved. It's all national recruiting and it's a different game.”³⁴ The fact the team had instant chemistry being close on and off the field helped, recalled end Al Grigalinunas, “We didn't have a huge team in terms of numbers. I think the key factor was we really started the same 11 people for all 10 games. In fact, two guys got hurt before we started the season and they never really worked themselves back in the starting lineup because the other guys were playing well.”³⁵

The team's nine victories was the most since eight wins in 1938. Martha earned consensus All-American honors and totaled 1,691 all-purpose yards in his Pitt career, including seven total touchdowns. He played in the Hula Bowl, East-West Shrine Game, and the Senior Bowl following the 1963 campaign.³⁶

³⁰ Von Benko, George. “Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team,” PittsburghSportsReport, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022,

<http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.

³¹ Von Benko, George. “Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team,” PittsburghSportsReport, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022,

<http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.

³² Von Benko, George. “Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team,” PittsburghSportsReport, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022,

<http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.

³³ Von Benko, George. “Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team,” PittsburghSportsReport, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022,

<http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.

³⁴ Von Benko, George. “Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team,” PittsburghSportsReport, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022,

<http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.

³⁵ Von Benko, George. “Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team,” PittsburghSportsReport, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022,

<http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.



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³ 6 Von Benko, George. "Pittsburgh Panthers 1963 No Bowl Team," PittsburghSportsReport, October 2003, accessed September 24, 2022, <http://www.pittsburghsportsreport.com/2003-Issues/psr0310/03100110.html>.