

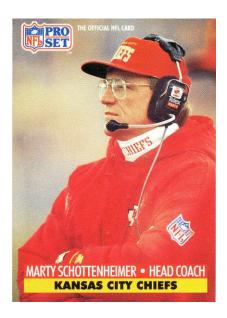
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# **Marty Schottenheimer**

This article was written by Budd Bailey

Marty Schottenheimer was a winner. He's the only coach with at least 200 NFL wins in the regular season who isn't in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Marty made bad teams good, and good teams better over the course of a coaching career that lasted more than 30 years. He has a better winning percentage than Chuck Noll, Tom Landry and Marv Levy – all Hall of Famers.

"He not only won everywhere he went, but he won immediately everywhere he went," wrote Ernie Accorsi in the forward to Schottenheimer's autobiography. "That is rare, believe me."



The blemish in his resume is that he didn't win the next-to-last game of the NFL season, let alone the last game. The easy comparison is to Chuck Knox, another fine coach from Western Pennsylvania who won a lot of games but never took that last step either. In other words, Schottenheimer never made it to a Super Bowl as a head coach. Even so, he ranks with the best in the coaching business in his time.

Martin Edward Schottenheimer was born on September 23, 1943, in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. That's about 22 miles from Pittsburgh to the southwest. As you might have guessed, that part of the world is rich in two things: minerals and football players. Much



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of the area was employed directly or indirectly by the coal and steel industries over the years. As for football, that's part of the culture in Western Pennsylvania.

"The people are proud and tough and they love their football," Schottenheimer once said to the Associated Press. "I can look up in the stands at Browns-Steelers games and see some of the same people I saw at high school games."

Marty soon moved to nearby McDonald, and that town with the redbrick streets will always be home. He grew up there in a house with three siblings, an aunt, an uncle, and two grandparents. Schottenheimer eventually went to high school at Fort Cherry. Bengals coach Marvin Lewis grew up in that town (Lewis' aunt was Marty's babysitter at one point), but Perry Kemp is the only other NFL football player from that school.

Schottenheimer was a linebacker – and a good one – in high school under coach Jim Garry. Marty played in the Big 33 game, an all-star contest that in one form or another dates back to 1958. Schottenheimer also was part of a state champion basketball team, as the Rangers were big winners in 1961. Marty graduated from high school in 1961.

It was a natural move to college football from there, especially when the nearby University of Pittsburgh offered him a scholarship. Not only did it offer a good football program and was nearby, but it also had a dental school. Marty turned down Penn State, Virginia, and Maryland to go to Pitt. Waiting for him was the head coach of the Panthers, John Micheloson, who had taken over in 1955. Micheloson had winning seasons in five of his first six years, but his teams went on something of a roller-coaster ride starting in 1961 when Schottenheimer arrived. Pittsburgh had records of 3-7, 5-5, 9-1 and 3-5-2. Obviously the best team was the 1963 edition, which finished fourth in the final Associated Press poll. Its only loss was to a powerful Navy team, led by Roger Staubach. Marty earned letters as a center/linebacker for the 1962, 1963 and 1964 seasons.

Schottenheimer became an English literature major at Pitt (he says he had problems with the science classes needed for dentistry), and he quickly developed a reputation among the media as an interesting interview. After one game, he said, "By knowing an opponent's weakness, we can take away his advantages." By the standards of the day, that was almost philosophical.

"He was so well spoken and literate," said Beano Cook, sports information director at Pitt at the time, in Schottenheimer's autobiography. "But let me tell you, he was a damn good football player too. Don't let him or anyone else kid you. I sent out letters to every sportswriter in the country trying to get him first-team All-American his senior year. He was that good."



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Schottenheimer had to settle for being an All-East pick as a senior. He figured to go fairly early in the NFL and AFL draft and thus have his choice of teams. Baltimore of the NFL picked him in the fourth round (No. 49 overall), while Buffalo of the AFL selected him in the seventh round (56<sup>th</sup> overall). Schottenheimer there had a couple of good choices, since both teams were good. He went with the Bills ("The Bills showed more interest in me," he told Buffalo's public relations staff), who had just won the AFL championship, instead of the Colts, who fell short in the NFL title game against the Browns. Once he got his bonus check, Schottenheimer paid off the mortgage on his parents' house.

Marty played in the North-South and Senior Bowls at the end of the regular season, and in the Coaches All-American and College All-Star Game just before training camp before arriving in Buffalo to play for the Bills. Marty arrived in suburban Buffalo to join his new teammates, and he no doubt immediately noticed that the Bills were well-stocked at linebacker. The starters were Harry Jacobs, John Tracey and Mike Stratton – probably the best trio in the AFL at that point in time.

Schottenheimer therefore stuck to substitution work at linebacker as well as special teams duty with the Bills. Jacobs, Tracey and Stratton were healthy for almost all of the season, and they were part of the reason why the Bills repeated as champions with another win over the San Diego Chargers. As we'll see, it's interesting that someone who gained a reputation for not reaching football's last game as a coach won a title in his first season as a player.

It was more of the same in 1966. Buffalo won the AFL East and advanced for the chance to play in the first Super Bowl, only to lose to the Kansas City Chiefs. Schottenheimer again did not have a start at any point in the season. However, Marty – who checked in at 6-foot-4 and 225 pounds - did make his first pro interception; it came against Miami in Nov. 6, and he ran it back 20 yards. Quarterback George Wilson threw six completed passes that day: three to guys in Dolphins uniforms, and three more to the ones in Bills' colors.

Schottenheimer had been paying attention during his first two seasons, and noticed that linebackers tended to look good when defensive tackle Tom Sestak was playing in front of them. "Sestak was *the* guy on that defense," Marty said. "Tom was very strong, very physical on the defense. Unfortunately, it was bad knees that brought his career to an abrupt end."

The 1967 season was something of a good news/bad news situation for Schottenheimer. The team slumped badly, falling to 4-10 and well out of the playoff race. At least Marty got some playing time for a change. Jacobs missed some time due to injury suffered on Nov. 6 against Miami, and Schottenheimer filled in for him. His interception total for the



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season jumped to three, as he had two picks against Boston on December 9 and a third against Oakland on December 24. They must have been a thrill for his new wife, Patty. They were married in the previous offseason.



Jacobs was back in the lineup at the start of 1968, teaming up with Stratton and Paul Guidry. That sent Schottenheimer back to the bench for most defensive plays. He also saw time on special teams of course. The worst part of the season was probably that he had to watch it. The Bills fell to 1-12-1 in 1968, putting them at the bottom of the AFL.

That sort of record leads to change, and the biggest one as far as Marty was concerned probably concerned the head coach. Harvey Johnson had been the interim coach for most of 1968, and he was replaced by former Oakland coach John Rauch. It didn't take long for Rauch to make an impact, and one of his changes was to cut Schottenheimer from the roster. For the month of September, it looked as if the linebacker's pro career was over.

But on October 1, Schottenheimer's phone rang. The Boston Patriots wanted to sign him. Marty was off to New England, and he served as the backup to Jim Cheyunski for the rest of the 1969 season. It was the same story in 1970, except that the team was worse. The Patriots fell from 4-10 to 2-12. As Schottenheimer prepared for the 1971 season, the phone rang again – this time telling him that he had been traded with a draft choice to Pittsburgh for Mike Haggerty. That must have seemed like a dream come true for a Western Pennsylvania native, but Steelers coach Chuck Noll waived him in late August and then worked out a deal with the Colts to send him to Baltimore for a 10<sup>th</sup>-round draft



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choice. The Colts looked at him for two weeks, and then cut him before he played a game.

Schottenheimer's playing days were over. He finished with 79 games played (11 starts) with six fumble recoveries. Marty smoothly moved into the world of real estate from there. A couple of years later, it looked as if Schottenheimer's football story was written.

But in 1974, something odd happened. Schottenheimer came to grips with the fact that he missed football. What's more, a new league was starting called the World Football League, so there were plenty of openings for coaches.

Dick Coury hired Schottenheimer to be his linebackers coach, and Marty's coaching career got under way. The WFL had more than its share of funny stories during its brief history, but it gave plenty of players and coaches a chance to work in pro football. Coury was well-regarded by most football people, and he was smart enough to give Schottenheimer a chance. The team went 7-12-1 and then fell apart financially. Coury and Schottenheimer both went looking for other jobs, and found them in the NFL. Coury landed as the linebackers coach of the San Diego Chargers, while Schottenheimer had the same position with the New York Giants.

The Seventies weren't a great decade for the Giants, but at least Marty had an NFL job. What's more, he worked under head coach Bill Arnsparger, who had been the defensive coordinator for the Miami Dolphins in their championship era in the early 1970s. New York went 5-9 in 1975, and then started 0-7 under Arnsparger, who was fired. John McVay was named as his replacement, and the Giants rallied a bit to finish 3-11. Schottenheimer at the age of 33 was promoted to defensive coordinator in New York in 1977, where he had an excellent set of linebackers in Harry Carson, Brian Kelley and Brad Van Pelt." I can honestly say there would be no Harry Carson without Marty Schottenheimer," Carson told the New York Daily News. "One of the most important things he told he was 'Don't clutter your mind with unimportant things.' He developed men."

Even so, the Giants were 5-11 and Marty had to move on to his next job. It was in Detroit. The Lions went 7-9 in 1978, but collapsed to 2-14 under Monte Clark a year later. The inevitable housecleaning followed, and Schottenheimer started making calls about the next position. This time, his timing was perfect. He landed the defensive coordinator's job with the Cleveland Browns in 1980 under head coach Sam Rutigliano. The Browns had a sensational season, as Brian Sipe and the rest of the "Kardiac Kids" piled up one thrilling victory after another in a magical 11-5 season. Cleveland lost to Oakland in the playoffs on a late interception by the Raiders, but few could complain



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about the ride. The Browns went from 20<sup>th</sup> in the league in points allowed to 12<sup>th</sup>, and Schottenheimer deserved some of the credit for that.

The 1981 season wasn't so magical, as the Browns slumped to 5-11. Cleveland was 4-5 in 1982, a season that was marked by labor problems, and the Browns lost to Oakland in the first round of the extended playoffs. A couple of December losses helped push Cleveland out of the playoffs in 1983 despite a 9-7 record.

Then things fell apart for Rutigliano. Cleveland lost seven of its first eight games to start the 1984 season. The worst one came when New England intercepted a pass in the end zone to preserve a 17-16 win, a play that caused owner Art Modell to blast the team's play-calling. At the season's midway point, Schottenheimer was named the head coach of the Browns. But first, he asked for a long-term commitment from Modell.

"He was adamant that it wasn't an interim job, because he felt they wouldn't play for him if they thought he wouldn't be back," Accorsi, the team's director of football operations at the time, told author Tony Grossi. "He wanted a fairly long-term commitment, and Art gave it to him."

Cleveland went 4-3 in its last seven games to give everyone a little hope. Then Schottenheimer benefitted from some wheeling and dealing. Bernie Kosar came out of Miami (Fla.) a year early, and the Browns made a trade with the Bills so they could take him in the supplemental draft. Kosar was considered a great prospect, and he came from Northeast Ohio so he was thrilled about the idea of playing with the Browns. It was a perfect match.

The Browns moved up to 8-8 in 1985 as Kosar eased into the starting job as the season went along. By 1986, Cleveland was ready for the next step. It went 12-4 to win the AFC Central, and advanced to the conference championship. With only a few minutes left, the Browns were ahead by seven points and the Broncos were 98 yards away from the tying score. Denver's John Elway moved his team down the field to tie the game – in a sequence remembered as "The Drive" – and the Broncos won in overtime on a Rich Karlis field goal, 23-20.

The 1987 season had a very similar feel to it. The Browns again won the AFC Central title, this time with a 10-5 record (a game against Denver was cancelled). Cleveland again moved into the AFC title game, this time at Denver. The Browns were the ones making the last-minute drive for a touchdown to win the game this time. But with 1:12 left, Earnest Byner lost the ball on the Denver 2 and the Broncos recovered. Cleveland lost, 38-33, in a game called "The Fumble."



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Byner left the field a changed man. "It changed the way I played the game some," he said about 16 years later to author Tony Grossi. "Nobody knew. It was pulling on me. ... I was basically slowly rotting inside. It was killing me. A lot of fans were devastated by that, which I know and I understand. But nobody was hurt more than me."

Schottenheimer and the Browns moved on from that, compiling a 10-6 record in the regular season in 1988. However, the playoffs ended with disappointment, as the Oilers earned a 24-23 win when injuries at quarterback proved fatal. By that time, Schottenheimer and Modell weren't getting along particularly well. Modell was said to be disappointed in the offense. The two sides agreed to go their separate ways. The Browns had gone 44-27 in the regular season under Marty, but 2-4 in the playoffs.

What's more, Schottenheimer had built a reputation as an excellent coach – someone who could motivate his players. "I remember coming here, and playing to the best of my ability – always prepared, working out and doing everything right," defensive back Ray Ellis said. "Marty approached me, and he asked me the question, 'Ray, why did Buddy (Ryan) let you go? ... We're trying to figure this out.' That was good enough for me. He was saying to me, 'I don't think anyone should let a player of this caliber go.""

You wouldn't think it would take Schottenheimer long to find another job, and it didn't. He had three landing spots available. "Steve Ortmayer was general manager at San Diego and offered me the opportunity to go there," Schottenheimer said. "And there was the possibility of going to Dallas as defensive coordinator. But I chose the Chiefs because of the history of success in Kansas City – albeit a number of years ago. I felt it could be recaptured."

The top job there was available because the Chiefs had fired Frank Gansz after a 4-11-1 season, and only 30,000 fans turned out for the last home game. Schottenheimer and general manager Carl Peterson agreed on a deal, and that was the start of a relationship that lasted 10 years — an eternity in pro sports. Marty put together a good staff in no time. Bill Cowher was his defensive coordinator, Bruce Arians coached the running backs, and Tony Dungy served as the coach of the defensive backs.

The Chiefs immediately became winners in 1989 with an 8-7-1 record, as Kansas City became a football town again. They improved 11-5 in 1990 and earned a wild-card berth in the AFC playoffs. Miami stopped Kansas City's hopes by scoring 14 straight points in the final period to win, 17-16. Schottenheimer's team took a step forward in 1991 by winning a playoff game after a 10-6 regular season. However, the powerful Buffalo Bills put a stop to their Super Bowl hopes with a 37-14 win.



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In 1992, Schottenheimer switched from Steve DeBerg to Dave Krieg as his starting quarterback. The Chiefs still went 10-6, and this time lost to the Chargers in the playoffs, 17-0. That led to one more QB switch, as Joe Montana came over from the 49ers for one last hurrah. Montana and the Chiefs did reach the conference final together after winning two playoff games. However, the Bills defeated the Chiefs, 30-13, to advance to their fourth straight Super Bowl.

Montana had one more year of play left in him, and he guided the Chiefs to a 9-7 record. A win against the Raiders on Dec. 24 put Kansas City in the playoffs again. The Chiefs couldn't outscore the Dolphins, losing by a score of 27-17. It was Montana's last game. Steve Bono couldn't be expected to replace Montana, but he did a good imitation of him in a Pro Bowl season. The Chiefs finished 1995's regular season with a 13-3 record, but lost to the Colts, 10-7, due in part of three missed field goals by Lin Elliott and three interceptions.

Along the way, Schottenheimer built up a reputation as a coach who was a quality person as well as good with the X's and O's. "He was someone who could give a passionate speech about peanut butter," Chiefs' tight end Jonathan Hayes said. "He would well up, but I loved him for it because he conveyed a passion for football."

Schottenheimer's run of playoff teams ended in 1996. After a 4-0 start, the Chiefs stumbled along until they lost their last three games and missed the postseason despite of a 9-7 record. The Chiefs bounced back in 1997 with a 13-3 record to win the AFC West, thanks in part to a defense that was first in the league in points allowed. Terrell Davis' fourth-quarter touchdown proved decisive in Denver's upset win in the ensuing playoff game.

Finally, the Chiefs had their first losing record under Schottenheimer in 1998. They went 7-9 during a year that included a six-game losing streak in the middle of the season. Schottenheimer decided to resign, and even owner Lamar Hunt couldn't talk him out of it. It had been a heck of a decade – a 101-58-1 record, three division crowns, seven trips to the playoffs. But the inability to reach the Super Bowl wore on everyone.

Marty took a couple of years to recharge his batteries, working on television broadcasts for ESPN. But he was ready to get back to work when he took the head coaching job with the Washington Redskins in 2001. Part of the lure was that he also earned the title of director of football operations. Schottenheimer led the team to an 8-8 season, fighting back from an 0-5 start with five straight wins – the first NFL team to do that. That was good enough for everyone but the impulsive owner of the team, Dan Snyder. Schottenheimer was ousted in favor of University of Florida head coach Steve Spurrier.



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And so Marty crossed the country for his next head coaching job with the San Diego Chargers in 2002. The Chargers had been 5-9 under Mike Riley, but Marty got them to 8-8 in his first year – typical of the way he had improved teams in his first year. San Diego slumped to 4-12 in 2003, mostly because of a porous defense. But that made the jump to 12-4 in 2004 that much more sweet. Drew Brees threw for more than 3,000 yards, and LaDainian Tomlinson scored 18 touchdowns. That turnaround, one of the best in NFL history, earned Schottenheimer coach of the year honors. The playoffs weren't as kind as the regular season had been, as the Jets took a 20-17 win over the Chargers.

San Diego fell to 9-7 and out of the playoffs in 2005, but roared back to life a year later with a glittering 14-2 season. Philip Rivers threw for 3,388 yards, and Tomlinson ran for 1,815 as the team lead the league in points scored. Yet all that was waiting in the playoffs was more disappointment. The Patriots beat the Chargers, 24-21, on a late field goal.

No one could have guessed it at the time, but that was Schottenheimer's last NFL coaching game. He had some differences with owner Alex Spanos and general manager A.J. Smith about the composition of the coaching staff. Four assistants had moved to better positions in the NFL after the 2006 season had been completed. Schottenheimer was fired on February 12, 2007.

"This decision was so hard because Marty has been both a friend and valued coach of our team," Spanos said in a statement. "But my first obligation is always to do what is in the best interest of our fans and the entire Charger organization. I must take whatever steps are necessary to deliver a Super Bowl trophy to San Diego. Events of the last month have now convinced me that it is not possible for our organization to function at a championship level under the current structure. On the contrary, and in the plainest possible language, we have a dysfunctional situation here. Today I am resolving that situation once and for all."

One NFL executive called it "the dumbest firing in history," but that didn't change the situation. Schottenheimer left San Diego with 205 career wins (including the postseason), the most by any coach who didn't reach a championship game. One of those postseason losses still hurt years later. "The only one I ever reflect on is 'The Drive' because we had every opportunity to win that football game," Marty told author Tony Grossi in 2001. "In that particular game, I can virtually recite 'The Drive.' That has bothered me."

Still, the way Schottenheimer's career unfolded – with so many wins along the way but none when it mattered most – seems almost cruel. "I think he was jinxed," sportswriter Joe Posnanski said in a video. "Marty didn't tell Earnest Byner to fumble. Marty didn't tell Lin Elliott to miss those field goals. ... Those sorts of things shouldn't happen to the same guy."



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Dungy added, "I look at it the other way, at what he got out of some teams that weren't as talented (as others)."

Schottenheimer's impact on the league extended for many years after his departure, thanks to some of the assistants he hired. Besides Cowher, Ariens and Dungy, the list included such names as Gunther Cunningham, Herm Edwards, Mike McCarthy, Cam Cameron, Wade Phillips and Rob Chudzinski.

Schottenheimer went back to television work that season, but left in 2011 at the age of 67 to coach the Virginia Destroyers of the United Football League. He missed coaching. "Marty would coach in the Lingerie League if he could," Tomlinson told the New York Daily News. That Virginia team won a championship, beating Las Vegas by a score of 17-3. The victory meant Marty entered pro football as a champion, and exited as a champion. By the way, Schottenheimer had to sue to get much of the money that had been promised from a \$1.1 million contract.

Marty has been married to wife Pat since 1968; they met in Daytona Beach, Florida, in 1965. They had two children: daughter Kristen and son Brian, who became an assistant coach in the NFL. Marty's young brother Kurt also did some coaching in the NFL.

In 2011, Schottenheimer was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and the family has been coping with that slow decline as best as they can since then. Marty and Pat have been living in Charlotte during those years. In 2016, when the story went public, Brian Schottenheimer said he was trying not to think about the possibility of CTE in his father's brain caused by his playing career.

"Were there side effects to him playing? Probably," he said to the Kansas City Star. "But we don't spend a lot of time thinking about it; we don't spend a lot of time worrying about it. Our choice has been to live in the moment. And we wouldn't be where we are as a family, I wouldn't be where I am today as a coach, he wouldn't have accomplished the great things he did (if not for football).

"We love the game of pro football, and we look back and think of the happier times and try not to figure out what went wrong. It's a troublesome situation; it is what it is and now how are we going to make the most of it."

As for Marty, he identified his legacy long ago.

"One Play at a Time," he once said to the New York Daily News. "Put it on my tombstone."



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