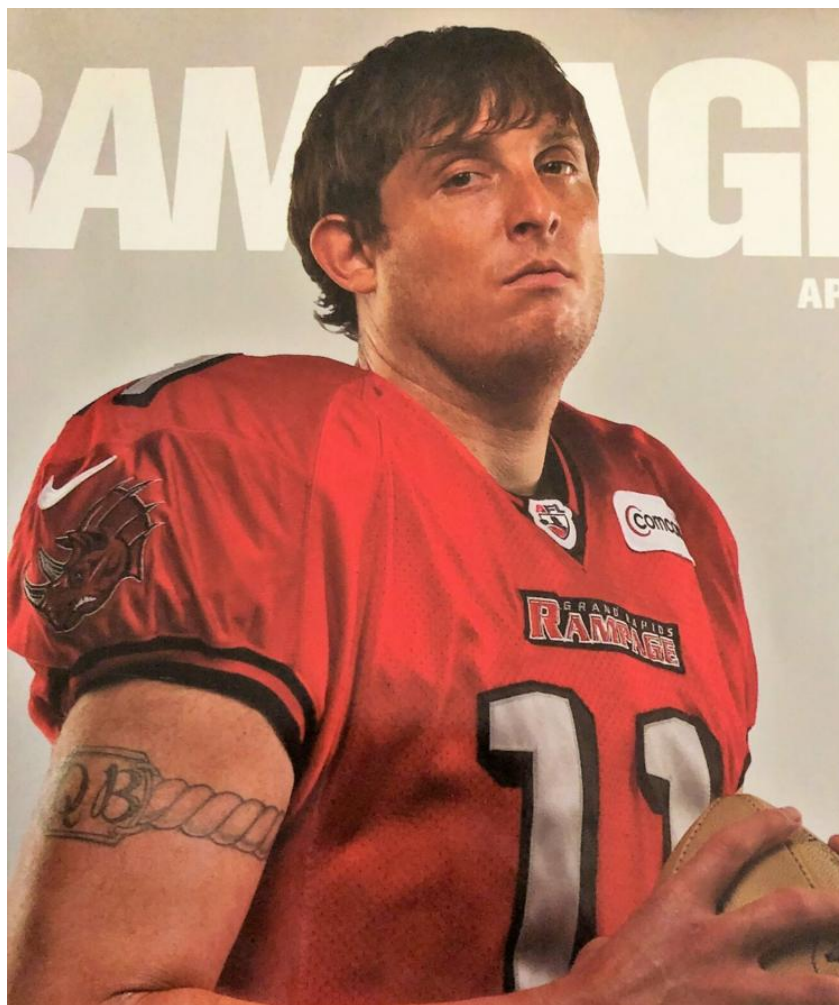


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TOP STORY

Into the Hall: Chad Salisbury

By George Von Benko and Rob Burchianti rburchianti@heraldstandard.com
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Submitted photo

Frazier graduate Chad Salisbury is shown during his playing days with the Grand Rapids Rampage of the Arena Football League. Salisbury is part of the 2020/2021 class of inductees for the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame.

Submitted photo

Chad Salisbury uses the word “lucky” a lot when looking back on an athletic career that has led to him being part of the 2020/2021 class of inductees for the Fayette County Sports Hall of Fame.

Rest assured, however, it was far more than luck that led to the Frazier graduate's amazing success on the football field and basketball court.

Salisbury and the rest of the inductees and representatives will be recognized at a Hall of Fame Golf outing/Luncheon/Social starting at 9 a.m. on June 25 at Pleasant Valley Golf Club in Connellsville.

The 6-foot-6 Salisbury was a three-sport star for the Commodores, playing football, basketball and baseball, who went on to be a starting NCAA Division-I quarterback at New Mexico State and then at the University of Buffalo before going on to excel in the Arena Football League from 2000 to 2007.

"Growing up in this area and being a sports fan, the names that are involved with being in this Hall of Fame, it's a real honor to be a part of it," said Salisbury who spoke recently about his induction on George Von Benko's Sports Line Talk Show on WMBS Radio.

"I was lucky enough a few years ago when Joe Lafko, one of the great athletes from Frazier and this area, was inducted and I was able to attend that with my dad."

Salisbury played football under his father, Tom "Woody" Salisbury, and took an unusual path to becoming a quarterback.

"My dad always jokes that he was under anesthesia when that happened," Salisbury said with a laugh. "He had to have a procedure in the hospital. I was actually a tackle my freshman year and a tight end my sophomore year.

“We went to Kevin Donley’s run-and-shoot camp down at Cal U. I was just chucking it around a little bit, I was trying to play tight end/wide receiver. I was probably going to move back to tackle. And I believe the head coach at Cal said you all need to look at him as somebody that might be able to throw that ball for you.

“So they did and I threw it around a little bit at that camp and the assistant coaches made that decision and just kind of went to my dad and said, hey, we’re doing this. It really worked out well for me.”

Did it ever.

The Commodores were the first team in the area to use a run-and-shoot offense with Salisbury under center and had great success with it.

In his first year as starting quarterback as a junior in 1993 Salisbury completed 154 of 293 passes for 2,346 yards and 26 touchdowns as the Commodores went 8-3 and made the WPIAL playoffs where they lost to a powerful Aliquippa team.

Frazier was 5-5 his senior season when he threw for 2,095 yards and 20 more touchdowns.

“You say those numbers now, I think people would be like that’s pretty average. They throw the ball so much more nowadays,” Salisbury said. “Back then that was new and our coaches kind of implemented it and we were able to chuck it around a little bit. It was a lot of fun. We won some football games. We did it in a way that hadn’t been done around here. That offense was a lot of fun and it really propelled me in my athletic career.”

Salisbury was named all-conference twice and was chosen for the Post-Gazette Fabulous 22 team as a senior in football.

Salisbury also posted eye-opening numbers in basketball at Frazier, recording 1,534 points and 1,500 rebounds in his high school career while helping the Commodores make three straight WPIAL playoff appearances.

Salisbury, playing under coach Joe Lafko Sr., was on Frazier teams that went 15-5, 18-7 and 15-10 during his senior season of 1994-95

“I had a great coach, Joe Lafko,” Salisbury said. “Coach Lafko, coach (Larry) Mikesell, coach (Tom) Gill, those guys worked with me and we had some success on the basketball court and I was lucky enough to contribute a little bit to it.”

Salisbury also was a pitcher and a first baseman in baseball at Frazier under coach Joe Gessner.

Salisbury credits his dad for helping him develop into such a stellar, well-rounded athlete.

“He taught me how to throw, he taught me how to swing a bat, shoot a basketball ... everything that needs to be done to play a sport, my dad was the first guy that taught me how to do those things,” Salisbury said. “Then when he became my head coach ... he’s still to this day the best and most demanding coach I’ve ever had.

“When he became my high school football coach he prepared me for pretty much everything that I came across in my athletic career and after that.”

Woody Salisbury’s impact at Frazier is still felt today.

“He was a longtime head coach there and won a whole bunch of football games,” Chad Salisbury said. “He really impacted a lot of guys’ lives. To this day, when I see former players of his, whether they be older or younger than me, the first question is ‘How is your dad?’ And they start telling stories about when he was coaching them.”

Salisbury had to make a choice of which sport to play in college.

“I always loved basketball,” he said. “It was the sport that I really wanted to play in college. But when they moved me to quarterback my junior year, there’s something about that position, it’s just different. The ball’s going to be in your hands every play, people are going to look to you to fix issues and make plays and be the person that’s going to lead the team.

“That was just intoxicating to me. When I first became a quarterback I knew from that point that, boy I’d really like to do this for a long time.”

Still, Salisbury fielded some basketball offers among the NCAA Division-I football scholarships that were coming his way.

“There was some D-II interest in me,” Salisbury said. “But I think that by that time everybody kind of knew where I was leaning. There were some people that mentioned it to me and I know coach Lafko really pushed me to at least consider it so I took some phone calls and did some research on it. But midway through my junior year I knew what I wanted to do in college.”

It was a former Super Bowl champion that helped lure Salisbury to New Mexico State for football.

“Roy Gerela, who obviously people around here would know from the ‘70s Steelers, was the tight ends coach and special teams coordinator down there,” Salisbury said. “He was watching a film of somebody else from up here in the Century Conference and caught me on it and made a couple phone calls. We connected, I went down for a visit and I loved it down there.

“I went on the visit in January, got off the plane, it was like 74 degrees. It was a great place to start my college career. I got off the plane in El Paso and drove about 45 minutes up to Las Cruces. It’s a beautiful place.”

Salisbury took over as the Aggies’ starting quarterback his sophomore year in 1996 and threw for 2,291 yards and 11 touchdowns under coach Jim Hess, but Tony Samuel took over the football program the following year.

“They brought in a coach who was formerly from Nebraska,” Salisbury recalled. “If you’ve ever seen me play, I’m not Tommie Frazier. They were going to make a position change for me. I wasn’t going to fit that option offense down there.

“So I made a few phone calls, called everybody I could think of and got really, really lucky. A guy named Max Bowman caught my tape up at Buffalo. We kind of connected pretty quickly. My dad and I went up there for a visit and I committed pretty shortly after that.”

Salisbury threw for 4,947 yards and 31 touchdowns in two years with the Bulls and passed for over 200 yards 12 times. He was named All-America honorable mention by the Football Gazette after his junior year.

“I had great wide receivers, Salisbury said. “We had a really solid offense those two years. We had good running backs, a nice offensive line, the other guys were solid ... I was lucky.

“It was a little harder to chuck it around there when you got into late October, November in Buffalo but I had really good players around me. We were able to put up some good numbers.”

Salisbury's football career was far from over after he graduated from Buffalo. While he didn't hook on with an NFL team he did find his way into the Arena Football League.

Salisbury played eight seasons in the Arena Football League, throwing for 12,104 yards and 217 touchdowns while posting a quarterback rating of 101.42. His best season came in 2006 with the Grand Rapids Rampage when he threw for 3,239 yards and 58 touchdowns.

"The Arena Football League was a blessing," Salisbury said. "It was right up my alley, three-step, five-step drops and throw it every play. That game is so fun. If you haven't seen it live you've got to see it live. It's smaller, it's more compact. There's a lot more action. It's a great game.

"I was lucky to play for some great coaches and played with a lot of good football players, guys that had played in the NFL or guys that went on to play in the NFL."

Salisbury retired as a player in 2007 but continued in football as a coach and athletic director at Byron Center High School, and in August 2008 he joined the AFL's Los Angeles Avengers staff as quarterbacks and wide receivers coach.

From there Salisbury went to the California University of Pa. football program where he is currently the Vulcans offensive coordinator.

"Extremely lucky. I landed at California University of Pennsylvania about 12 years ago," Salisbury said. "I've been able to stay there for a long time and be a part of a great program, a winning program. I've been through three coaches there, all three of them are outstanding head football coaches. I've been very lucky to be part of that program."

After Cal's 2020 football season was wiped out by the COVID-19 pandemic, Salisbury anticipates a return to normalcy this year.

"That's what everybody's hoping for," he said. "Our kids, I just can't give them enough credit, the things that they've done the last two-and-a-half semesters. They've really shown maturity, just a positive attitude through a very difficult time for a lot of people.

"It's been tough on them. They missed an entire season and those guys love to compete. But we had a good spring and spring drills. They got after it. It was nice to kind of get our feet wet again playing football."

Football continues to be part of Salisbury's life and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I tell people to this day I'm one of the luckiest people in the world," Salisbury said. "I got to play football and still let football be a part of my life. I feel like I've never really had a true job."

Salisbury, who said he will attend the Hall of Fame Golf outing on June 25, is thankful to be part of the Class of 2020/2021.

"I really do appreciate it," Salisbury said. "It's a great honor."