



## GENE UPSHAW: FROM LABORING ON THE LINE TO LABOR LEADER

By Kerry Schmidt

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A little meaningless junk first.

No speaky de English?

Well, if you can't you will not be able to play in the LPGA by the end of 2009. All players who have been in the league two years or more must be able to speak English, LPGA deputy commissioner Libba Galloway said.

She added that "If they fail to pass an oral evaluation of their English, they could be suspended." "That policy is a pretty bold statement," said David Carter, a sports marketing consultant in L.A. "But from a business standpoint, it is very important and a good move," he added.

Of course, the ACLU immediately said they may file suit, even though 100% of LPGA members agreed with the edict. ACLU sucks.

Wow, why can't we do something re illegal immigrants?

A 9-year old boy has been banned from playing baseball in his New Haven, CN league.

Why? He is too good, say the officials of said league. Jerico Scott, all 4'2" 74 pounds of him, pitches at 40 MPH, which is too fast for the kids to hit, says the league (not affiliated with Little League Baseball) spokesman, who refused to be named.

When Jerico's team took the field last week, the opposing team forfeited the game.

The league said his team would be disbanded and the other players distributed to other teams.

Jerico's coach, Wilfred Vidro says the team will refuse to disband. "How can you punish a kid for being too good," he said.

Vidro and the team's parents say he is being punished because he turned down an invitation to join the defending league champion, which happens to be sponsored by an employer of the league's administrator.

Scott's family has hired John Williams as his attorney to sue the league.

His mother says it's all political. "The top league official was upset because the star player would not play on his team."

I've heard and been involved in a lot of vicarious stories about parents/officials and kids, but this has to be the most idiotic one ever.

Most lawyers say the case is a "home run" winner for Jerico. This is Lesson No. 1 on adults screwing up kids' play.

Final Olympics stuff.

Of all the Olympics related stories – newspapers, websites, network and cable TV, 26.6% were about Michael Phelps.

U.S. gymnast Nastia Liukin, the second most covered athlete, got 4%.

Does the name John Jarvis ring a bell? No? Well, he was one of the biggest winners at the Olympics. Say what?

Did you notice the crazy, patchwork type of black or blue "stuff" on several players, most notably Kerri Walsh's shoulder?

I kept wondering what the heck it was!

Well, it is called "Kinesio Tape, and is made by Jarvis's company. He says it is designed to give support to muscles and help rehabbing injuries. Lance Armstrong and Tiger Woods have worn it, but not until Walsh' TV appearances did it become known.

Jarvis donated 50,000 rolls of it and it was used widely. His website saw a huge surge in hits and, for a time, his tape was the most searched on Google.



“We couldn’t have paid for better exposure,” he said. “We won the lottery.

All right, who the F cares about that.

Gene Upshaw. He went from being one of, if not the greatest offensive lineman ever, to being, arguably, the most powerful man in the NFL.

He died in a Lake Tahoe hospital August 20, only three days after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and just five days after, as he himself said, “63 turned 63.”

A No. 1 draft choice by the Raiders, he went on to play 15 years, never having to be taken out of a game and only missing one in his career.

He was a 6-time All-Pro and was inducted into the Hall-of-Fame in 1987, the first player to be so who played his entire career as an offensive guard.

He was a giant of a man back in the 60’s when only 2 players were over 300 pounds and the average lineman weighed 237. His 6’ 5” and 265 pounds of meanness and power made him “the greatest offensive guard ever,” said owner Al Davis.

His nickname was “Highway 63” (his number). He was partnered with Hall-of-Fame tackle, Art Shell, who played next to Upshaw. The two of them combined to form the most successful pulling tandem ever, leading the Raiders to lead the league in rushing 10 times.

Mark van Eeghen, the prime Raiders RB then, described the left-side swath that the snorting Upshaw would blaze, with his big Afro and full beard, with his arms – encased in three entire rolls of tape, swinging and waiting to club anything that moved.

“No defensive player liked seeing him coming around that left end,” said van Eeghen.

He was the only man to play in Super Bowls in three decades, winning two. He was the only man to start in both AFL and NFL Championship games. Only Jerry Rice (29) started more playoff games than Upshaw (28).

But as great a player as he was, it was after he quit playing that he became the most influential man in the NFL.

Upshaw was an extremely quiet man, never revealing much about anything, but always studying everything, to the minutest detail.

Several NFL execs, including Steelers’ owner Dan Rooney, commented on his loss of weight, but knowing that his food intake consisted of a banana and five sips of coffee until a light dinner, they did not press it, especially when Upshaw would not comment on the weight loss. Typical. In fact, he had to be persuaded by his wife and Dr. Mayer, on the phone from the East Coast, to prod Gene to go to the emergency room Sunday night.

When he did, in his typical fashion, he told no one, not even his immediate staff, and checked in under an assumed name. He was like a sealed vault, someone once said. He wanted no PR, no recognition, and enjoyed being completely secret.

Two days of tests revealed the truth. When told of his condition, he said nothing. He just smiled, shook his head, and within 24 hours, he was gone.

The big C won the only battle he ever lost.

Dr. Mayer said, “Once he got the word, it was like he drew up a game plan, and said, ‘This is how a man dies.’”

Miki Yaras-Davis, the NFLPA’s director of benefits, exclaimed, “Two days (from diagnosis to death) is a record. But that man was always setting records.”

Only after his death, did the rest of the world hear about it. No one even had an inkling he was ill. That was his way. Never let anyone know that you are thinking.

Former commissioner Paul Tagliabue, a close friend and the man with whom Upshaw worked, and sometimes fought over the union vs. management, was awakened at 1 A.M. After he heard, he said, “I spent all day thinking, and I honestly believe that no one man had the impact on the NFL that he had.”



Upshaw went to work for the NFLPA immediately after retirement, and in 1983, shortly after the players' 57-day strike shut down the NFL for eight weeks, he was named its president and executive director.

In 1983, the average player's salary was about \$90,000. Today, largely due to Upshaw, it is \$1.7 million, with huge improvements in benefits, pension and healthcare.

Upshaw's MO was to listen. Always listen, then make your statements. His mantra was, "whatever you do, stay together."

His quiet way included making his own coffee, photo copies and faxes. He booked his own plane, hotel and car rentals, fixed his own office toilet and always left his staff in the dark as to his thoughts and whereabouts. He rarely answered his cell phone.

Upshaw saw way back in '83 his desire for free agency. But it took many years and a huge lawsuit in 1993 to settle it.

He led a second strike in 1987, and then in 1991, he really made the decision that eventually led to his goal of free agency.

In a 1991 lawsuit, the judge ruled in favor of the owners, saying that since the NFLPA was a union, the owners were entitled to antitrust exemption.

In response, Upshaw took the huge path to decertify the player's union, thus stripping them of said protection.

Without it, Upshaw hammered out what is now free agency. It was still being fine-tuned when in 1993, the deciding lawsuit, Reggie White vs. the NFL, allowed Upshaw to get a contract for total free agency and a guarantee of a 60% cut of all revenue for the players. In return, a salary cap was set up. In '93, the caps first year, it was \$34.6 million. Today it is \$116 million.

"What he accomplished, I don't think the players of today really understand how huge he has been in the salaries, pension and benefits we have today. He made it all happen," said Bengals' WR, T.J. Houshmandzadeh, a current player rep.

Not all agreed with him, however. Many of the older players – from the 50's and 60's, say he has "forgotten all about us." They say the newer players are set, but the retired players began to demand increases in pension and especially in the rules over disability and insurance claims.

Mike Ditka has led a strong argument to increase same, particularly for healthcare expenses.

But a good number of the old timers are not happy. They point to the \$6.7 million compensation package Upshaw had in 2006, and certainly did not endear himself to them when he said "I work for the union players, the ones I took over in 1983, not the retired players."

One retired hall-of-famer, Buffalo's guard Joe DeLamieure, who continues his complaints, caused Upshaw to blurt out a highly un- Upshaw show of emotion when he said, "I'd like to wring his neck."

Another soft and generous side that virtually nobody knew about: Upshaw loved to provide for friends in the union. His generosity towards orphans or widows of former players was huge. It is estimated that on over 200 occasions, he quietly gave checks to those people. Again, no one knew.

Regardless, for the players of the last 15-20 years, the huge amounts of monetary gains and up-front guarantees, among other things, all of that is due to Upshaw.

No matter his detractors, he still, as many have said, was most likely the most powerful man in the league.

From a great player beginning in his early 20's, to the powerful leader he became for over 25 years, he will be very hard to replace.

The owners have said they will opt out of the salary cap agreement after the 2009 season, so whoever will take over the NFLPA's side of the situation, well, there may not be another Upshaw



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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out there. Without his knowledge, connections and reputation, it may well be an ugly ride for the NFL after 2009.

Upshaw had said before his death, that the players “sure as hell” are not going to give up the 60% deal, so we shall see.

He was a man among man. Not only will he be missed, he may be impossible to replace.

Well, I must now get ready for Mr. Gustav to show up. Damn kraut. I sure do not want to go through what I did three years ago. At least I have a stand-alone generator, so I will have electricity, but.....oh, and single malt scotch.