

Former Marshall player Johnathan Goddard dies in motorcycle accident

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HUNTINGTON — A reel of highlights immediately spool at the mention of Johnathan Goddard.

There was No. 50, compromised gait and all, taking a Kansas State bobble the other way for a shocking touchdown, sparking an all-time Marshall University football win. Goddard also returned an Ohio State fumble 27 yards to the end zone and was a disruptive force at Georgia.

Bottom line, he was the guy who soaked in and thrived on the largest stage.

That enthusiasm and genuine joy of life ended too soon this weekend when Goddard, 27, was killed in a motorcycle accident in northern Florida. Florida Highway Patrol officer Ron Cooper confirmed that Johnathan Bruce Goddard was killed in the single vehicle accident in Clay County, Fla. The accident occurred at 7:46 p.m. Saturday, and Goddard was pronounced dead at 6:30 a.m. at Shands Medical Center in Jacksonville, Fla.

"This is a terrible loss for our football family, and our thoughts and prayers are with the Goddard family," Marshall head coach Mark Snyder said.

Goddard always was spurred to reach the NFL, a dream that seemed unlikely at best entering his junior season. But after detailing his aspirations with Thundering Herd coaches and receiving frank feedback, Goddard was a different player in 2003. He totaled 6.5 sacks, 20.5 tackles for loss, three forced fumbles and three pass breakups, teeing up his breakout senior year.

It began with the strip and score against Ohio State, one of three touchdowns during his career. His intensity was relentless, ranking among the nation's top six in sacks (16), tackles for loss (28), forced fumbles (5) and recovered fumbles (3). Goddard's forced fumble total led Division I-A. Goddard is Marshall's lone defensive player to earn Division I-A All American honors.

Former Marshall head coach Bobby Pruett tutored Goddard start-to-finish during the defensive end's five-year run with the Herd. On Sunday, Marshall's all-time winningest football coach reflected on the maturation of a man in lieu of a stellar playing resume.

"The thing that Johnathan did from the time he came to Marshall as a nonqualifier with a learning disability who was mainly into football was that he grew into a student-athlete and a man," Pruett said. "He used the resources the university offered him and that God had given him, and he became a daddy. He just grew as a person and grew into an outstanding young man who became an All American.

"It's a tribute to him and his daddy and his mom."

On the field, Pruett appreciated most the playmaking defender who assumed the baton from so many previous Thundering Herd greats. Again, Goddard embraced the marquee moments.

"He truly exemplified the message of our football program that in nine seasons we never went into a game where we didn't think we would win," Pruett said. "And every year someone was the driving force in your program from Randy Moss to Chad Pennington to Byron Leftwich to Steve Sciullo to Darius Watts to Johnathan Goddard.

"All of those guys had All American qualities that you have to have. He willed us to the Kansas State win, and he almost willed us to a win at Ohio State and a Georgia win.

"(But) with him, I told his daddy earlier today of all of the things on the field, the greatest thing was to watch him grow in the respect he grew to give people, and as a student-athlete he grew leaps and bounds.

"No one's perfect but, jiminy, he grew. The college experience worked for him."

An NFL career kicked off when the Detroit Lions selected the pass rusher in the draft's sixth round. He later signed with the Indianapolis Colts and, although injured, was on the roster of the Colts' Super Bowl XLII championship squad.

Injuries halted his brief professional football career, but the game remained at the forefront. Goddard returned to Huntington several times for Bartrum and Brown Football Camps and Green-White Marshall spring games. He dodged the spotlight, however, literally capturing moments of alone time in a faraway corner of Joan C. Edwards Stadium, only to be approached by a reporter.

He politely agreed to the interview, unknowingly displaying another indicator of a growth from teenager to man. Goddard the underclassman spoke in whispers, eyes often drawn downward; on this day and in several subsequent conversations, it was voiced with confidence and with eyes locked.

Compounding the tragedy, Goddard leaves behind two young children on Father's Day weekend. He is survived by daughter Baylee and son Johnathan Jr., along with father Johnnie and mother Kathi.