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Talking Sports History



*Photo courtesy of Purdue Athletic Communications
George Karlaftis, Purdue Defensive End from 2019-2021, in action against the Iowa Hawkeyes*

Kenny Ponders Which Boilermakers Deserve To Have Their Number Retired

Ever since the New York Yankees honored the dying Lou Gehrig in 1939 by declaring no one would wear his No. 4 again, retiring uniform numbers has been seen as the ultimate tribute to an athlete.

More than 80 years later, the Yankees have strayed off the path of honoring all-time greats. Paul O'Neill is set to become the 23rd Yankees player to have his number (21) retired this summer. As a Cincinnati Reds fan, I'll remember O'Neill fondly for his role with the 1990 World Series champions.

But Lou Gehrig he isn't.

The Chicago Bears have retired 14 numbers during their rich history, the most of any NFL team.

Dick Butkus (51). Mike Ditka (89). Red Grange (77). Bronko Nagurski (3). Walter Payton (34). Gale Sayers (40). Names that immediately come to mind when thinking about all-time great Chicago Bears players.

The Monsters of the Midway even have their own Lou Gehrig. Brian Piccolo's death in 1970 at the age of 26 from cancer was memorably depicted in the classic ABC movie "Brian's Song" in 1971.

Purdue University officially doesn't retire athletes' numbers. Along the rafters of Mackey Arena, banners with the player's name and number are displayed for the men's and women's basketball program's consensus All-Americans and 2,000-point scorers.

Two numbers on display, Stretch Murphy's 27 and Norm Cottom's 7, are not available under today's college basketball rules. No jerseys can begin or end with 6, 7, 8 and 9.

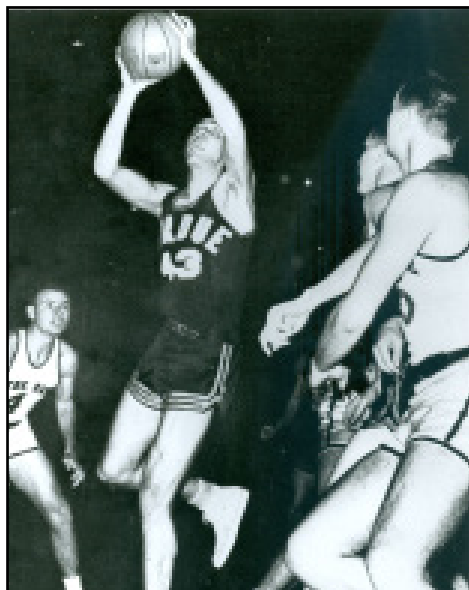
For the sake of argument, which men's basketball numbers should be retired at Purdue?

Basketball record books at Purdue go back to 1950-51, so John Wooden wearing No. 13 isn't listed among the all-time number roll call.

Wooden was the 1932 National Play-



KENNY THOMPSON
Columnist



Photos courtesy of Purdue Athletics Communications

Terry Dischinger (left) and Rick Mount (right) in action for the Boilermakers.

er of the Year and a three-time consensus All-American guard for coach Piggy Lambert.

Playing in the days of the center jump after every basket, Wooden still managed to average 12.1 points a game as a senior.

Thirteen was also a lucky number for another Purdue national player of the year.

"In only two seasons on the basketball court, Glenn Robinson dominated the competition like no other athlete in Purdue history," begins Robinson's Legends of Purdue Basketball biography.

That's not an exaggeration.

Robinson had to sit out his freshman season due to NCAA academic requirements so the anticipation was great when he donned No. 13 for the 1992-93 season. All Robinson did that year was lead the Big Ten in scoring at 25.5 points a game and average 9.2 rebounds.

Winning MVP honors at the Great Alaska Shootout to start the 1993-94 season, Robinson quickly became the favorite to win national player of the year honors.

"Glenn is a man playing among boys out there," said Lefty Driesell, who coached James Madison when Purdue defeated the Dukes 98-74 in 1994.

Robinson's final game in Mackey Arena saw him score a career-high 49 points against Illinois to wrap up a Big

Ten Conference championship.

He was named the 1994 consensus national player of the year and earned first-team All-America honors. Robinson was the Big Ten's player of the year and led the country in scoring with 30.3 points per game.

No one has worn No. 13 since Robinson and it may be as close to a retired number as it gets at Purdue.

A close second on iconic Boilermaker basketball numbers is Rick Mount's 10. No one has worn that number since Bobby Riddell in 2006. As long as Matt Painter is the coach at Purdue, that streak will continue.

"You don't duplicate greatness," Painter told Indianapolis Star columnist Gregg Doyel in 2016. "There's never gonna be another Rick Mount."

Before he set foot in West Lafayette, Mount was already a nationally known name thanks to his appearance on the cover of Sports Illustrated on Feb. 14, 1966. His fame only grew after putting up 28 points against the reigning national champion UCLA Bruins in his varsity debut.

With Mount averaging 33.3 points a game as a junior, Purdue reached the NCAA championship game in 1969 against UCLA. Mount made sure Purdue reached its first Final Four by hitting the game-winning shot against Marquette with seconds to play.

Now 52 years after his final game,

Mount remains Purdue's all-time leading scorer at 2,323 points. No one has approached his career scoring average of 32.3 per game.

It's difficult to call a member of the College Basketball Hall of Fame underrated but for some reason Terry Dischinger's three-year career at Purdue is frequently glossed over by today's fans and media.

Maybe it's because his scoring records fell so quickly, first to Dave Schellhase and then Mount less than 10 years after Dischinger's final college game.

But No. 43 led the Big Ten in scoring all

three seasons and averaged 28.3 points a game for his career. Dischinger also had a career double-double, pulling down school record average of 13.7 rebounds.

Schellhase's No. 42 is my final choice. As a scorer, I'd rank Schellhase second to Mount and slightly ahead of Dischinger.

Becoming the first Purdue player to reach the 2,000-point level was no easy feat in the days of three-year varsity eligibility and 24-game seasons. Schellhase led the nation with an average of 32.5 points a game as a senior.

Like Dischinger, Schellhase recorded a career double-double of 28.8 points and 10 rebounds a game. A three-time first-team All-Big Ten forward, Schellhase also was a two-time consensus All-American.

Not bad for an athlete who had modest goals coming out of Evansville North.

"My goal when I came to Purdue was to be a starter as a sophomore," Schellhase told the Journal & Courier's Tom Kubat in 2007. "As it turned out, I was All-Big Ten as a sophomore. I thought a legitimate goal was to be All-Big Ten as a senior."

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The Long, Fabled History Of The Den Of Defensive Ends

In these cynical times, from politicians who think lying is no big deal to college basketball transfers being publicly offered \$800,000 and a car to sign with a new school, it was nice to see that tradition still means something.

George Karlaftis shed a tear in a video produced by Purdue Athletics Communications when informed during a Zoom call with another Boilermaker All-American that he was the newest member of the Den of Defensive Ends.

“It’s cool to see your career culminated in being an All-American,” said Ryan Kerrigan, who is Purdue’s most recent first-round NFL draft pick and an All-American who has played with Washington and Philadelphia. “We’ve had a few good defensive ends come through Purdue and we’re excited to see you carry the torch now.”

Karlaftis is now the 13th member of the Den and the second from West Lafayette High School. Chike Okefor, who enjoyed a long NFL career, was one of Karlaftis’ mentors in high school.

“Chike is the one who taught me how to play the game,” Karlaftis said. “To be able to see my name next to greats like (Kerrigan) and Drew Brees and Rod Woodson, just to name a few, it’s an honor to say the least.”

Karlaftis became emotional while revealing that it was a dream of his to earn membership in the Den.

“That was one of my goals when I came in here, and that’s incredible,” he said. “The tradition of defensive ends and defensive linemen at Purdue is elite and rivals any other college. It’s an honor to be mentioned in the same conversation as all these guys. ... An elite fraternity that’s for sure.”

Playing in 27 games over his Purdue career, Karlaftis earned All-Big Ten honors following all three seasons as a Boilermaker. He was a second team honoree as a freshman and sophomore before becoming a consensus first team selection in 2021, collecting first-team All-America honors as well.

While Purdue football is best known as the Cradle of Quarterbacks, former athletics department official Tom

Schott coined the Den of Defensive Ends in 2004.

Starting back in the late 1940s to the mid-1950s with future NFL players Leo Sugar and Lamar Lundy, the Den of Defensive Ends gained the bulk of its membership during the Joe Tiller era. Since 1999, 10 Purdue defensive ends have gone in the NFL draft, with Anthony Spencer (2007) joining Kerrigan as a first-round selection.

Here’s a chronological look at the Den of Defensive Ends.

Leo Sugar (1949-51) – A consensus All-American and first-team All-Big Ten selection in 1951, Sugar played nine seasons in the NFL with the Chicago/St. Louis Cardinals, Philadelphia and Detroit. He earned Pro Bowl berths in 1958 and 1960. Sugar, who died in 2020, was inducted into the Purdue Intercollegiate Athletics Hall of Fame in 2006.

Lamar Lundy (1954-56) – The Richmond native was the first African-American to receive a football scholarship at Purdue. A giant in his time (6-7, 250 pounds), Lundy lettered three seasons in basketball as well as football. He is the only Boilermaker to be named Most Valuable Player in basketball and football in the same season (1956). Lundy chose a career with the Los Angeles Rams over the NBA, joining forces with Deacon Jones, Merlin Olsen and Roosevelt Grier to form the “Fearsome Foursome,” to this day regarded as one of the most dominant defensive lines in NFL history. Lundy was inducted into the Indiana Football Hall of Fame in 1975, the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame in 1990 and the Purdue Hall of Fame in 1996. Lundy died in 2007.

Keena Turner (1976-79) – Turner thrived under College Football Hall of Fame coach Jim Young in the “Junk Defense” created by assistant Leon Burtnett, earning two first-team All-Big Ten selections.

“I was fortunate to benefit from it, which had me in the rush sometimes and dropping back in coverage at times,” Turner told the Lafayette Journal & Courier’s Tom Kubat in 2008.

With Turner leading the way, the Boilermakers went 19-4-1 in his final two seasons capping off with the

school’s only 10-win season in 1979. Turner played 11 seasons with the San Francisco 49ers and earned four Super Bowl rings. He was inducted into the Purdue Hall of Fame in 2006 and earned his degree in 2021 alongside youngest daughter Ella.

Chike Okefor (1994-96, 1998) – Like Karlaftis, Okefor came to Purdue after leading West Lafayette to a state championship. He spent Joe Tiller’s first season at Purdue under suspension but when he returned in 1998, Okefor teamed up with Roosevelt Colvin to form a powerful 1-2 pass rush. Okefor went on to play 11 seasons in the NFL with San Francisco, Seattle and Arizona.

Rosevelt Colvin (1995-98) – A three-year starter, Colvin still holds the Purdue records for sacks in a season (15 in 1998) and career (35). The two-time first-team All-Big Ten selection earned two Super Bowl rings with the New England Patriots. Colvin’s 10-year NFL career included stops in Chicago and Houston. His daughter, Raven, plays volleyball at Purdue. Myles, a junior at Heritage Christian, has committed to play basketball for the Boilermakers.

Akin Ayodele (1999-2001) – Ayodele had a strong debut season at Purdue after transferring from Coffeyville Community College, recording 11 sacks and 19 tackles for loss. He recorded nine sacks as a junior and a senior, earning first-team All-Big Ten honors in 2001. Ayodele spent nine seasons in the NFL with Jacksonville, Dallas, Miami and Buffalo.

Sean Phillips (2000-2003) – The converted tight end started 49 consecutive games. Phillips recorded 14.5 sacks as a senior, earning first-team All-Big Ten and second-team All-American honors. His 33.5 career sacks rank second to Colvin in school history. Phillips recorded 81.5 sacks in an 11-year NFL career that was spent mostly with San Diego.

Anthony Spencer (2003-06) – As senior, Spencer was second in the nation with 26.5 tackles for loss and paced the Big Ten with five forced fumbles. He earned first-team All-Big Ten honors and departed Purdue with 21 career sacks. Spencer was a first-round pick

by Dallas in 2007 and spent all but one of his nine NFL seasons with the Cowboys.

Ray Edwards (2003-05) – Purdue outrecruited Tennessee for Edwards’ services and during his three seasons Edwards recorded 16 sacks while dividing time with fellow Den members Cliff Avril and Rob Ninkovich. He collected 33 sacks in a seven-year NFL career with Minnesota and Atlanta.

Rob Ninkovich (2004-05) – One of the best junior college transfers to suit up for Purdue, Ninkovich’s eight sacks as a junior ranked second in the Big Ten. Eight more sacks came as a senior. Eight seemed to be Ninkovich’s lucky number as a Boilermaker. That number also was his career sack total against Indiana. Cast aside by New Orleans and Miami, Ninkovich found his niche in New England with 46 career sacks and two Super Bowl titles in an 11-year NFL career.

Cliff Avril (2004-07) – The Jacksonville, Fla., native was almost unstoppable as a junior and a senior, recording 30 of his career 35.5 tackles for loss and 12.5 of his 13 career sacks. Those numbers helped him earn a third-round draft pick from Detroit. Once Avril escaped to Seattle in 2013, his pro career took off with a Pro Bowl berth in 2016 and a Super Bowl XLVIII victory. He retired in 2017 with 74 career sacks and 30 forced fumbles.

Ryan Kerrigan (2007-10) – Purdue’s first unanimous All-American since Mark Herrmann and Dave Young in 1980, Kerrigan graduated with a Big Ten and FBS record 14 fumbles forced. Kerrigan matched Sean Phillips’ 33.5 career sacks. He was the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year and the Big Ten Defensive Lineman of the Year in 2010. Selected 16th overall by Washington in the 2011 NFL Draft, Kerrigan started every game until injury sidelined him in 2019. His 95.5 sacks rank first in Washington team history.

- Kenny Thompson is the former sports editor for the Lafayette Journal & Courier and an award-winning journalist. He has covered Purdue athletics for many years.



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