

Neshaminy's Petercuskie headed to state Hall

Former coach made a name for himself in pro and college ranks

BY ANDY VINEBERG

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John Petercuskie coached high school football at Neshaminy so long ago, many of his former players are now grandfathers. His final game with the Redskins was in 1965.

Still 25 years later his name and reputation carry great weight on Heartbreak Ridge.

And across Pennsylvania.

Friday, Petercuskie will receive a

long-overdue honor when he is inducted into the Pennsylvania Scholastic Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame. The ceremony will take place at 1:30 p.m. at the Hershey Lodge in conjunction with Saturday's Big 33 high school all-star game between Pennsylvania and Ohio.

"I never even knew they had a scholastic Hall of Fame," Petercuskie, 75, said from his home on Cape Cod. "But I'm very honored. I appreciate every thing that ever happened to me at Neshaminy. Anything we accomplished was because of the kids we had and the assistant coaches I worked with."

Don't let Petercuskie's humility fool you. His record is staggering.

After five successful seasons as a co-head coach with Harry Franks, Petercuskie took over the Neshaminy program in 1960 at age 35. Over the next six years, the Redskins went 59-1-5, including a 51-game unbeaten streak from 1961-65.

And then, suddenly, he was gone, off to Dartmouth University to begin a long and successful career as a college and NFL assistant.

"It was a sad loss to Neshaminy and Lower Bucks football when he left," said Jack Stricker, a 1961 Neshaminy graduate who scored 150 points for the Redskins in 1960. "He's one of the nicest people I've ever known, and the best football coach I ever played for."

"Harry [redacted] nominated him for induction this year, his name was presented before the 37 coaches on the committee. His induction was approved unanimously."

Most longtime Neshaminy supporters are probably shocked to learn that it's taken Petercuskie this long to be inducted into the state Hall of Fame. The reason, quite simply, is he hasn't been eligible — and technically still isn't.

Current Neshaminy coach Mark Schmidt, one of two District One representatives (along with retired Central Bucks West coach Mike Pettine) on the Hall of Fame committee, explained that Petercuskie didn't meet two of the criteria necessary for induction — years as a head coach and at least 100 victories.

But after Petercuskie's son,

Harry, nominated him for induction this year, his name was presented before the 37 coaches on the committee. His induction was approved unanimously.

"I totally took for granted that he was already in," said Schmidt, who is in his second year on the committee. "When his nomination was brought up, all 37 coaches unanimously voted him in, even though he missed in two of the criteria. That's how super he is."

Schmidt has formed a special relationship with Petercuskie since coming to Neshaminy in 1995.

"Mark puts me on a pedestal I don't belong on," Petercuskie said. "He treats me like a king. I'm a Neshaminy rooter because he's there."