



Tom Dempsey

Tom Dempsey will forever be remembered for a remarkable, record-shattering play on November 8, 1970. On that day, while playing for the New Orleans Saints, Tom kicked a 63 yard field goal with two seconds left in the game to defeat the Detroit Lions. His record stood as his alone until Jason Elam of the Denver Broncos tied the distance record twenty-eight years later in 1998 at Mile-High stadium.

Prior to 1974 in the NFL, the goal posts were on the goal lines instead of the end lines. With time running out, the Saints attempted a place kick with the holder spotting at the Saints' own 37-yard line. The snap was good and Dempsey nailed the field goal with a couple of feet to spare. The win was one of only two for the Saints in that otherwise-forgettable season. Dempsey's kick shattered the seventeen-year old mark of 56 yards.

Dempsey was born without toes on his right foot and no fingers on his right arm. He wore a modified shoe with a flattened and enlarged toe surface. This generated controversy about whether such a shoe gave a player an unfair advantage. When reporters would ask him if he thought it was unfair, he said "Unfair? How about you try kicking to kick a 63 yard field goal to win it with 2 seconds left and you're wearing a square shoe; oh yeah, and you have no toes on that foot either."

The legendary Saints kicker is more than happy to talk about the only thing anybody ever wants to discuss- his kick. Thanks to the kick, Dempsey is a famous name. Tom states that while standing on the sidelines with the coaches before the play, he told the coaches "I can kick it". To his recollection, Tom heard one of the coaches say, "Tell Stumpy to get ready." Of course, Stumpy was Dempsey; nicknames back then could be cruel. He knew the attempt was long but didn't know it was going to be a 63 yard attempt. "If I'd known it was 63 yards, I might have messed it up," he says. He tried to remember what kicking great Lou "The Toe" Groza had once told him: "Keep your head down and follow through." He did, in that straight, head-on way, unlike all the soccer-style kickers of today. And the rest is history.

In his career, Tom played for the Saints, Philadelphia Eagles, Los Angeles Rams, Houston Oilers and Buffalo Bills. He was a First-Team All-Pro in his rookie season of 1969 and also played in the Pro Bowl that same season. Tom is ideal to speak to groups about overcoming challenges, including physical impairments. How many athletes with a physical disability ever climb to the pinnacle of their sport for a day let alone for 11 years? Sadly, Tom's family home was flooded by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and he had another challenge to overcome. Like always, he has.



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