GRIDIRON GREATS TO HONOR DISTINGUISHED 2026 HALL OF FAME CLASS

Don Beebe, Gary Fencik, Ben Garland, Bernie Kosar, Lisa McHale, Christian Okoye & Jason Riley recognized



Gridiron Greats Hall of Fame 2026

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, September 23, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Gridiron Greats Assistance Fund will honor an extraordinary group of football players, leaders and advocates at its 2026 Hall of Fame Gala on Friday, October 2, at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare Chicago.

The 2026 Gridiron Greats Hall of Fame Class includes Don Beebe, Gary Fencik, Ben Garland, Bernie Kosar, Lisa McHale, Christian Okoye and Jason Riley, representing accomplishments spanning the NFL and CFL, military service, coaching, education, player and family advocacy, and decades of service to others.

Established by Pro Football Hall of Fame coach and Chicago Bears legend Mike Ditka, Gridiron Greats provides financial and medical assistance to retired NFL players and their families facing difficult circumstances.

Don Beebe played nine seasons in the NFL, appearing in six Super Bowls during a career that included time with the Buffalo Bills, Carolina Panthers and Green Bay Packers. Following his playing career, Beebe carried his passion for football into coaching and mentoring young athletes.

Gary Fencik spent his entire 12-season NFL career with the Chicago Bears, becoming a defensive captain, two-time Pro Bowler and Super Bowl XX champion. His 38 career interceptions remain a Bears franchise record, and his success continued well beyond football.

Ben Garland, recipient of the Marv Levy Impact Award, has built a life at the intersection of football and military service. A United States Air Force Academy graduate, Garland served on active duty before beginning a decade-long NFL career. He continues to serve as a Major in the

Air National Guard while remaining deeply involved in efforts supporting service members, veterans, military families and communities across the country.

Bernie Kosar became one of the NFL's most recognizable quarterbacks during a 12-year career, most notably with the Cleveland Browns. The former University of Miami standout later earned a Super Bowl championship with the Dallas Cowboys and remains closely connected to the football community.

Lisa McHale has dedicated her life to helping football families navigate the devastating effects associated with brain trauma. After her husband, former NFL offensive lineman Tom McHale, died in 2008 and was subsequently diagnosed with CTE, she turned personal tragedy into advocacy. McHale now serves as Director of Legacy Family Relations with the Concussion & CTE Foundation, providing guidance and support to families facing similar journeys.

Christian Okoye, famously known as the "Nigerian Nightmare," became one of the NFL's premier running backs during his career with the Kansas City Chiefs. A two-time Pro Bowler and

NFL rushing champion, Okoye's powerful running style made him one of the most distinctive players of his generation.

Jason Riley spent 10 seasons with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats and was part of the club's 1986 Grey Cup championship team. After football, Riley devoted decades to education and coaching, including a 25-year coaching tenure at McMaster University, where he helped develop generations of student-athletes.

Together, the 2026 honorees reflect the broader purpose of the Gridiron Greats Hall of Fame: recognizing not only excellence in football, but leadership, perseverance and meaningful contributions long after the final whistle.

The Hall of Fame Gala also serves a critical purpose for the organization. Funds raised through the event help Gridiron Greats provide direct assistance to retired NFL players and their families

facing urgent needs involving medical care, housing, utilities, transportation and other essential

expenses.

2026 Gridiron Greats Hall of Fame Gala
Friday, October 2, 2026
Hyatt Regency O'Hare Chicago
Rosemont, Illinois

Tickets, tables and sponsorship opportunities are available at bit.ly/GGAF2026HOF.

ABOUT GRIDIRON GREATS ASSISTANCE FUND
Founded in 2007, Mike Ditka’s Gridiron Greats Assistance Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to providing financial and medical assistance to retired NFL players and their families in times of need. Gridiron Greats works to ensure that the individuals who helped

build the game are not forgotten when they face challenges after football.

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