

Super Bowl-bound owners alike

By DAVE GOLDBERG
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Dan Rooney was attending the funeral of Giants owner Wellington Mara in October when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

He turned around and saw Bill Parcells. "You have to carry the torch," the two-time Super Bowl-winning coach told the owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers. "You're our guiding light now."

The 73-year-old Rooney has been one of the NFL's inner circle for a quarter-century or longer.

But the death of Mara, the New York Giants owner who died at 89, made Rooney the final active member of the NFL's founding fathers. Or, more accurately, the son of a founding father: Art Rooney, known as "The Chief," started the team in 1933 as the Pittsburgh Pirates when his son was a year old.

Paul Allen, the owner of the Seattle Seahawks, whom Rooney's Steelers will meet in the Super Bowl on Feb. 5, is a founding father himself, of Microsoft, which he began in 1976 with Bill Gates.

If Rooney is the NFL's most influential owner, Allen might be its least.

"I've only met him twice," Rooney said this week. "He seems like a pretty nice guy."

Still, the man listed by Forbes as the world's seventh richest (Gates is No. 1) is becoming more visible lately as the Sea-



At left: Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney, left, and team president Dan Rooney II, center, talk with Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay before an AFC division-

hawks have ascended to a place in the sports world they've never before approached.

A computer whiz who dropped out of Washington State, Allen, 52, has always shunned the public spotlight. He left Microsoft in 1983 to battle Hodgkin's disease, and Gates has always been the face of the software giant.

Rooney actually cares little about attention, too.

He has no biography in the team's media guide, where the only reference to him is under administration on page 2: "Daniel M. Rooney, Chairman."

And while he's far more available to the public and the media, he doesn't seek the spotlight, often walking quietly out of league meetings, leaving the cameras to the likes of Dallas' Jerry Jones and a few others. He often eats lunch in the cafeteria of the Steelers' training facility, dining with everyone from groundskeepers to quarterbacks.

Truth is, the shy Allen and the more open Rooney actually have a lot in common.

Both are patient with their teams. The Steelers have had two



AP PHOTOS

At right: Seattle Seahawks owner Paul Allen lifts the trophy after his team beat the Carolina Panthers in the NFC title game Sunday.

coaches since 1969. Bill Cowher, hired in 1992, is the longest-serving current NFL coach with the same team and has survived a few 6-10 seasons that would have cost him his job with less patient bosses.

Allen has stuck with Mike Holmgren, hired in 1999, even though entering this season his record was 50-49 with the Seahawks, including 0-3 in the postseason, after winning one Super Bowl and getting to another in Green Bay.

Both are civic-minded. Rooney has been a fixture in

Pittsburgh going back to 1949, when he was a second-team all-city quarterback behind a guy named John Units.

And his interests are almost all in sports. He and his brothers own racetracks and dog tracks, businesses started by their father.

Allen, who also owns the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers, bought the Seahawks in 1997 to keep former owner Ken Behring from moving them to his home state of California.

The Seahawks' success has brought Allen out in public more often. "Reclusive" is being dropped as the prefix to "billionaire." He's been surfacing a lot lately to cheer on his team, raising the "12th man" banner that honors the Qwest Field fans before the NFC Championship game and showing up to chat with the media in the locker room.

"I've been to a few Super Bowls, and I was at the game last year just hoping that one day we'd be able to get there," he said. "I may seem like a mild-mannered guy, but my gut was churning inside: 'Let's win this game. Just win this game. We've got to win this game.'"

Spoken like the fan he has always been.

"If you're a fan of NFL football, how great is it to be able to root on your team to win the Super Bowl?" he said. "It's incredible."

Rooney has had a lot more success and a lot more failure.

But he's handled both with a sense of perspective, one reason why NFL commissioners past

and present have turned to him as the voice of reason.

He helped end player strikes in 1982 and 1987. More recently, he chaired the league committee that has helped increase the number of black coaches in the past four years from two to six. The "Rooney Rule" requires all teams with head coaching vacancies to interview at least one minority candidate.

He also is one of the people who worked out the modern salary cap, and he is involved in a revenue-sharing dispute among owners as the leader of a number of small-market teams.

Rooney's commitment to diversity is shared by Allen, who now directs Vulcan Inc., a management company which invests in science, the arts and movie production, among other things.

When the Seahawks and Steelers meet in Detroit, Allen will watch the game with a fan's eye.

Rooney will watch it as a football man, hoping things go right but knowing they can go wrong quickly. He's seen both sides.

The Steelers have made the AFC championship game six times in 12 years but won it only twice in that time.

For Rooney, this Super Bowl is almost as big as the first one, 31 years ago.

"I feel almost the same now as I felt then, like it's the start of something with all the good, young players we have," he said.

"But I've been around this business too long to take anything for granted."

• Sue

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

initially rebuffed all reinstatement efforts by the Cooper family, Whiteland administrators and Franklin attorney Michael Harper, who represents the Coopers.

Because referees' decisions are final and biding per its own bylaws, the IHSAA does not have an appeals process for disputed calls. The organization rejects video tape and other evidence of controversial judgments.

But in this case, IHSAA Commissioner Blake Ress relented

and agreed to watch video of the match that Tim Cooper delivered to his office Friday morning.

After viewing the tape, Ress said he saw nothing that warranted an overruling. He said the video did show a head-butt, which might or might not have been intentional.

Either way, Ress said, motive doesn't trump the rule. He relayed his final determination to the Coopers through the family's attorney.

"I did look at the video," Ress told the Daily Journal on Friday afternoon. "When I looked at the video, I think there is a head-butt. I just said (to the attorney) I don't feel like I can overrule (the call).

"Especially after seeing it, I feel like a head-butt occurred."

The Coopers have never disputed that contact did occur. But they maintain it was the accidental result of two aggressive wrestlers trying to close a match.

At worst, Tim Cooper insists, his son should have been assessed a warning or a one-point deduction, not an ejection.

"When a referee doesn't give a penalty point or a warning, he's made a bad mistake when he disqualifies a kid, unless it's just really flagrant," Tim Cooper said. "And there's nothing flagrant about that."

"I don't agree with it all."

Ress said both wrestlers were

warned earlier in the match about being overly aggressive. And he reiterated that whether the collision was intentional or not, it was still a violation.

"It doesn't have to be intentional," Ress said. "By rule, you can be (called for) a flagrant misconduct for a head-butt, and there doesn't have to be any warning."

"And there was a warning earlier in the match about it being too physical to both wrestlers."

Ress reiterated that reviewing video or considering appeals is not standard IHSAA procedure. But he eased the policy in this instance because of the unusual circumstances and what was at stake for an unbeaten wrestler

who has no history of behavioral problems on or off the mat.

"I've done more for (Justin) than I've done for any other situation this year," Ress said. "But I don't feel like there was anything in the video that would cause me to change the decision of the official."

For Justin, the finality is especially crushing for an athlete who had dedicated his season to winning a state championship.

Justin's older brother, Chris Cooper, was a state champion for Whiteland in 2002. Another older sibling, Tim Cooper, was also a standout wrestler for the Warriors.

Justin, who his father said did not emerge from his bedroom for several days after the conference

meet, plans to join the Warriors today at the sectional.

Justin Cooper was unavailable for comment Friday.

"He's going to be fine," Tim Cooper said. "(Friday night's) going to hurt him worse than ever, when he knows it's all done."

"But he'll get through it. I'm all done with it. We did everything we could. We spent two weeks on this non-stop. I don't want to hurt any other kids. It was a bad call, we did everything we can, but it would just be silly to hold everything up."

"I've got nothing bad to say about (the referee) or anybody else. We tried all we could for our kid, and as far as I'm concerned, it's done."

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