

## **As always, Don McPherson, the former SU quarterback, remains a class act**

by Bud Poliquin/The Post-Standard

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Syracuse, N.Y. -- In this week's wonderful Syracuse University football audio slideshow presented by Frank Ordonez and Dave Rahme, the photos-and-words theme is fun. And, given the breadth of the Orange's 28-21 victory over Louisville on Saturday at the Carrier Dome, that's appropriate enough. The Cardinals did score the first touchdown of the game and they did score the last touchdown of the game. But the bulk of the 50 or so minutes in between those TDs was pretty much controlled by SU, which outpointed Louisville during that stretch 28-7 on the way to improving its record to 2-6.

The fun, though, was not reserved solely for the Orange doings across the evening. No, there was more of it to be had in watching Don McPherson, as glowing as an alum can be, as he was honored at halftime on Legends Day.

Now, McPherson you cannot possibly forget. He was the quarterback of that glorious 1987 Syracuse club that went 11-0-1. He was the guy who won that season's Maxwell Award (best player in college football), the Davey O'Brien Award (best quarterback in college football) and the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award. And in December, he'll be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.

And there he was, down there around the 50-yard-line, being cheered by the crowd for his goodness as athlete and citizen. Importantly, though, McPherson demanded that those former Orange teammates who were there in the building for the occasion had to join him on the field for the celebration. Without them by his side, there would be no show.

Brilliant, it was. Classy. Dignified.

Me? I was one of the lucky ones because I had the opportunity to talk with McPherson on Saturday . . . and this is what he had to say about his Syracuse career:

"I don't know if I've been able to put my arms around everything. I've had old teammates say 'Hall of Fame' this and 'Hall of Fame' that. I haven't been able to get there yet. Maybe when I'm older and my kids are older they'll look at me and say, 'Really?' Then it will take on a different meaning.

"I always said that I wasn't the best player in my own huddle. And I maintain that. We had Daryl Johnston and Rob Moore and John Flannery. There was a bevy of great athletes I was able to play with. We had good athletes on a great team. Football is the ultimate team game and I was honored to be just another one of the guys who played here for Syracuse."

As it turned out, McPherson finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting that glorious season to Notre Dame's Tim Brown. And he did so, then and now, without ill feelings. Again, the man's own words:

“I was fortunate to be there at the ceremony and be one of the top five players for the award. That was reward enough for me. The only think I felt disappointed about was that I wasn’t going to be the first African-American quarterback to win the Heisman Trophy. I would have liked to join Ernie Davis, who was the first African-American to win it, period. That would have been nice for Syracuse University. That’s the only thing that every bothered me about finishing second.”

One last thing. I asked, lightly, on Saturday evening what that 1987 Orange team would have done if it played this 2008 SU bunch, and Don laughed.

“What would we do against these guys?” he said. “Hey, if you put us in with the New York Jets, we’d beat them.”