

## Steve Freeman

### Football

It often happens in sports when you don't succeed the first time, try again. That recipe worked for Steve Freeman, and it led to not only one career in sports but two.

Steve, who played his prep career in Memphis, was selected by the New England Patriots in the 1975 NFL Draft following a stellar three seasons at Mississippi State. However, before the 1975 NFL campaign started, Steve was waived after the second preseason game. Steve didn't allow the small bump in the road derail his dream of an NFL career. After placed on waivers, Steve was picked up by the Buffalo Bills, and that led to 11 years of playing football at the highest level.

From 1975-86, Steve played in 190 total games, including a team record 169 straight. He missed only one game his entire career with the Bills, and his last season in 1986, Steve played despite having a broken wrist and wearing a cast. He led the Bills in tackles from 1980-86 and was the team's interception leader in 1980. A six-year captain, Steve had 23 interceptions, three touchdowns and eight fumble recoveries for his career. Among his honors with Buffalo were being named to the Silver Anniversary Team in 1984, the 35-Year Team in 1994 and the Top 40 Greatest Bills.

He played his final two seasons in 1987 and 1988 with Minnesota. Steve played his final NFL game in the 1988 NFC Championship versus Washington.

Steve's passion for football didn't end there. He moved to another position on the field — as an official. He first served as an SEC official from 1995-2000, reaching the pinnacle of that sport as he worked the 2000 National Championship Game in the Sugar Bowl. In 2001, Steve earned his "stripes" on an NFL crew and remained in that role until 2020. In his 20-year career, he worked numerous playoff games, including the 2004 and 2005 NFC Championships and Super Bowl 48 in 2014.

Steve's success in football can be traced back here to Memphis, where he was a standout for Coach Elmer Ray at Whitehaven High School. A three-year letterman, Steve was a tight end in the Tigers' single-wing offense. He scored seven touchdowns in 1971, the same year in which he was named Mr. Whitehaven. Steve also was a track and field star for the Tigers and won Tennessee outdoor state titles in the decathlon, 120 high hurdles and 220 high hurdles.

Steve moved on to Mississippi State, where he was a three-year starter at defensive back from 1972-74. He led the Bulldogs in interceptions his junior and senior campaigns and was a member of the 1974 Sun Bowl Championship squad.

Please welcome to the Hall of Fame, for football — Steve Freeman.