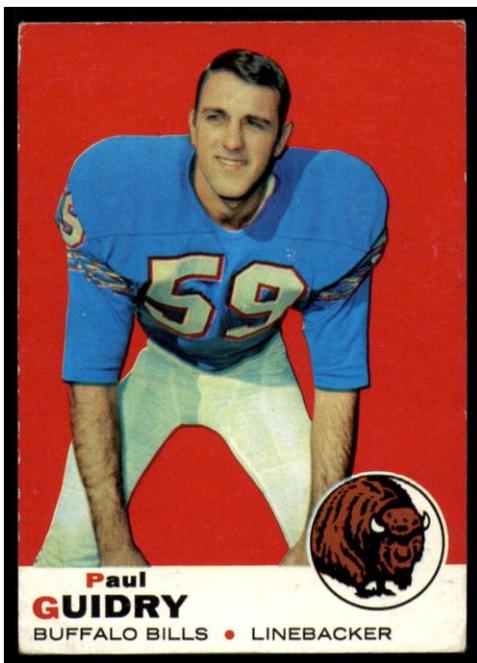


Paul Guidry

This article was written by Robert Blackstock.

“Tall Paul”ⁱ Guidry, the pride of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana was an outstanding high school athlete, a college hall of fame football star, and eventually the co-captain of the Buffalo Bills. He was friendly with fans, modest about his performances, a tireless worker and appreciative of his honors and awards.



Paul Michael Guidry was born January 14, 1944 to Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Lucere Guidry of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana (Crawfish Capital of the World with a population around 2,000 in 1944). As a youngster, Paul remembered his family was poor. He was asked about his picture on a bubble gum card after his career was over and said, “I was wow this was the ultimate, I was on a card!!! As a kid we were poor and couldn’t afford the luxury, but other kids would show me their cards occasionally.”ⁱⁱ In high school Paul excelled in football and basketball. He won many awards including Most Valuable Basketball Player, Best Linesman, Hardest Worker in Football and Best All-Around Athlete.ⁱⁱⁱ

After high school Paul enrolled in Louisiana State University (LSU) and played freshman football. He enlisted in the army reserve and served for six months of his six-year commitment. After army reserves, he enrolled at McNeese State University. He was a



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two-way performer at tight end and defensive end. He lettered three years and twice earned All Gulf-States Conference. He played on the undefeated 1963 team and another conference championship team in 1964. He led the team in receptions in 1964 with 11. As a result of his outstanding performance at McNeese State, he was inducted into the McNeese Sports Hall of Fame in 1991. He also earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in Health and Physical Education and a master's in administration and Supervisor, Health and Physical Education/Fitness from McNeese State.

With his college career over, Paul was eligible for the pro football draft. He was selected by the defending AFL Champion Buffalo Bills in the eighth round/73rd pick overall in the 1966 draft. He was a steal that late in the draft. Harvey Johnson, director of player personnel for the Bills stated, "Guidry has size, the speed, the toughness and the reactions according to our scouts to be an outstanding professional."^{iv} At this point Paul was listed as 6'3" and 220 lbs. Paul said of being drafted by Buffalo: "That was a real wow factor for me. Awesome to be selected by the champs."^v

Paul getting drafted was exciting news in Breaux Bridge. The local paper wrote "One of the greatest all-around athletes ever to come out of Breaux Bridge High School, Paul M. Guidry, was drafted by the Buffalo Bills, Buffalo, New York and signed a pro-football contract this week for an unnamed price."^{vi} As a result, the city of Breaux Bridge declared Tuesday, May 10, 1966 Paul Guidry Day. The proclamation read:

"Whereas; Paul Guidry has distinguished himself in the field of sports whilst a student of Breaux Bridge High School, and Whereas; He has exemplified qualities of a stellar athlete whilst attending McNeese State College and Whereas; His personal characteristics and good sportsmanship, both on and off the field of competition has won for him a contract with the Buffalo Bills of New York and Whereas; The honors conferred upon him reverts to the honor of his native Town of Breaux Bridge, NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Town of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, I do hereby proclaim, Tuesday, May 10, 1966 **PAUL GUIDRY DAY**, in the town of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana Louis M. Kern, Mayor."^{vii}

The day was capped off at the Breaux Bridge High Athletic Banquet which had Paul as the guest of honor. Paul gave a short speech on the importance of giving a 100% effort to be successful.

Paul attended his first Buffalo Bills training camp in the summer of 1966. Paul remembered "Competition was modest, no other linebackers to speak of, being that Buffalo was coming off two AFL Championships and had six proven linebackers. As the training camp weeks went by and the red message light on the telephone stayed unlit – lit meant, bring your playbook to the office, as you were released – I knew my stock was



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rising. On the last day and final cut day, I walked slowly to the dressing room and along the way a group of veterans were waiting outside with hair clippers and laughing. One said, come here rookie, and get your 40-man roster haircut.”^{viii}

Once the season began Paul noted how the transition from McNeese to the NFL was: “The transition was fairly easy, from playing the whole game in college at McNeese State University, tight end on offense, defensive end on defense, on kick-offs, and returns, punt and punt returns, etc. So, the transition was mild in that I was mostly on special teams my rookie season.”^{ix} Paul added, “Actually, it was a little like going to school. Practice and studying of game films, plays and procedures took up most of the time day and night. But I loved every bit of it.”^x Joe Collier the head coach noticed Paul’s abilities in practice: “See him move with the deep receiver, he’s got good speed.”^{xi} Paul played all 14 games mostly on special teams. He started one game. The Bills were 9-4-1 but got drilled 31 – 7 by the Kansas City Chiefs in the AFL Championship. With the win, the Chiefs played in the first Super Bowl and lost to the Green Bay Packers 35-10. For Paul’s Bills’ teams this was the pinnacle. Paul played for the Bills through 1972 and the teams’ record from 1967–1972 was 17–64-3 with the most wins in a season at four.

Paul played all 14 games in 1967 and started four of them at linebacker. In 1968 Paul started all 14 games. In a game vs San Diego, Guidry intercepted QB John Hadl which was his first professional interception. In the 1969 season Paul intercepted Joe Namath from the Jets and Darryl Lamonica from the Raiders. Guidry started the first eight games but injured his shoulder and had to have shoulder surgery and missed the rest of the season. In 1970 Paul started all 14 games and was selected to the second team All-Pro, the only All-Pro selection in his career. Also, in 1970, Guidry’s teammates kidded him about his uncanny resemblance to entertainer Jim Nabors. So, when Nabors attended the Bills game against the Los Angeles Rams in Buffalo (Nabors was a huge Rams fan) Guidry and Nabors got together for a comparison and had their picture taken. It is difficult to tell them apart in the picture.^{xii}

In 1971 Paul started all 14 games again and intercepted Johnny Unitas which was his career highlight. Guidry remembered: “As a 14-year-old kid in South Louisiana, the football player I idolized the most was Johnny Unitas of the Baltimore Colts. Now it’s 1970, in Baltimore, and I’m getting ready to face the Man, Johnny U. What a feeling to be on the same field as my hero! We lost the game, but I managed to step in front of a Johnny U. pass and intercepted his pass. I still have that ball and managed to have Johnny sign it years later. By the way, I still have that ball prominently displayed in a glass case with one of Johnny’s cards inside.”^{xiii}

After coming off a 1-13 year in 1971 Buffalo rehired Lou Saban as head coach. He had left Buffalo after coaching them in the 1965 championship season. Guidry was optimistic



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about Saban being hired: “I certainly feel that we should be doing better. Talking to older players that had been around when Lou was here, they have confidence in him. He drafted me but I never did play under him. But I understand from other players at Denver he is very fair with his players and I feel that he should start an uprising here again.”^{xiv} Though Paul cautioned a Super Bowl “is a little far out of our reach right now, I kinda feel that we’ll have a 7-7 or better,”^{xv} (The Bills finished 4-9-1).

Prior to the 1972 season Guidry was selected as co-captain with O. J. Simpson. Paul remembered that he and O. J. “were friends as teammates though they didn’t socialize much otherwise. As far as the time I knew him, O. J. was a good guy and heckuva a ballplayer.”^{xvi}

Also, in 1972 Paul and his wife were part of a group that traveled to Paris, France for a demonstration of professional football. The purpose of the tour was to raise money for the American Hospital in France and to bring a better understanding between the two nations. Included in the tour were NFL stars Tom Matte, John Mackey, Ben Davidson, Merlin Olson and entertainer Bob Hope.

Guidry had a very good football career in Buffalo, but Erik Brady of the Buffalo News wrote Paul’s “most lasting contribution to Buffalo, though, is a certain restaurant on Virginia Place. He and fellow linebacker Edgar Chandler opened Mothers (originally Mother’s Bakery) in 1972.”^{xvii} Guidry said, “I was back in Buffalo recently and stopped in. It was closed, we banged on the door and the manager let us in and walked around. Lots of memories in there for me.”^{xviii} When Mothers opened in 1972 it was a hangout spot for athletes from the Buffalo professional teams the NFL Bills, NBA Braves (today they are the L.A. Clippers) and the NHL Sabres. Players from the Sabres included the famous French Connection line of Gil Perreault, Rick Martin and Rene Robert. Guidry said they were surprised I could speak French but “being a Cajun from the Bayou. I could.”^{xix} Paul sold Mothers a few years after it started but it is still in business 50 years later in 2021.

In 1972 Paul was nominated for the Vitalis Man of the Year for his civic work. Guidry’s activities were described as “active in volunteer work with youth groups in the Buffalo area. His is particularly interested in community recreation centers and devotes much of his time trying to develop avenues of communication with the youth of today. He conducts clinics on sports in centers of this type. He has worked actively with muscular dystrophy telethons in the New York area.”^{xx}

After the 1972 season Paul was traded to the Houston Oilers for defensive end Allen Aldridge. Houston finished 1973 with a 1-13 record. Guidry played in all 14 games and started six. Heading into the 1974 season the NFL players went on strike. Paul had been



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the union representative for the Bills for 3 years. Once the strike entered a 14-day cooling off period, Paul drove 26 hours to Houston from his Buffalo home to be on time for the Oilers training camp in August. He attended a one-hour meeting when he arrived and then was cut by the Oilers General Manager Sid Gillman. Some players were upset about Gillman cutting the players, but Paul said, “This is the type of thing we’re striking against. Oh, well, maybe it will all work out for the good.”^{xxi} Guidry was claimed on waivers by the New York Giants but was cut a month later before playing in a regular season game.

As a result, Guidry’s NFL career was over. He signed with the Portland Storm of the World Football League in September. Paul had one interception with Portland and retired after the 1974 season.

Guidry reflected on playing in Buffalo and his NFL career. He played seven seasons in Buffalo at War Memorial Stadium and remembers he did not like playing on the baseball infield dirt because “you could get nicked up out there.”^{xxii} About the fans he said, “The fans in Buffalo were super supportive when you’re winning. If not, keep your helmet on.”^{xxiii} Paul’s biggest challenges in the NFL were “the Miami Dolphins and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Larry Csonka and Jim Kiick. If you didn’t get enough of them, you had to deal with Bob Griese, and Mercury Morris. Conversely, I played my best games against Joe Namath and the Jets. With Emerson Boozer and Matt Snell and later on John Riggins in the backfield, games against the Jets and the battle for NY State Champions were brutal.”^{xxiv} One of Paul’s most memorable games was against the Jets in Buffalo where Paul knocked down three Joe Namath passes and was awarded the game ball. Paul had Namath autograph the ball. The most impressive players he played against were Namath and Dick Butkus. Paul wrote, “Joe Namath threw the ball accurately, faked the ball well. Defensively Dick Butkus was really impressive. He had no fear, busted heads, tore through lineman, punished backs driving them into the ground.”^{xxv} Guidry enjoyed playing stars that “I had read about and followed in high school and college.”^{xxvi}

Guidry felt the most difficult part of leaving football was the camaraderie of teammates, fans transitioning into the real world “but most of all, that moment felt like the end of the world, meaning, from middle school football, you went to high school football, from high school you went into college ball, from college to pro and lastly, nothing after pro. It was “over,” a very big downer.”^{xxvii}

After football, Paul held jobs in supervisory positions with 7-eleven stores and interstate gas stations in New York and later New Orleans when his wife was transferred. Eventually he switched professions to education including teaching, coaching and an assistant principal position.



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Guidry wrote, “Football pretty much opened doors to all that I have accomplished, and football also taught me to work hard and never quit.”^{xxviii} After Guidry retired in Mount Juliet, Tennessee, he wrote to a fan that he appreciated requests for autographs: “rewarding when people like yourself want to have cards autographed, and putting older teams together with their sons and daughters or as a hobby, I thank you for remembering.”^{xxix}

Paul offered advice to current players. “I would advise them to finish college if they had not, save some of their money and invest wisely. Especially today’s dollars that players get, as compared to our time. We made very little money, and the reason most of us worked during the off season.”^{xxx} Guidry’s advice to be successful is “In order to excel you have to do what others don’t want to do.”^{xxxi}

Buffalo fan Jay Hobblin remembered Guidry well: “a smart linebacker who rarely made mistakes. He was a friendly guy, as I recall, quick to sign autographs and always smiling. I got the impression that he liked being a football player and liked being a Buffalo Bill, even though those teams at the end of the 60s and early 70s were not winners.”^{xxxii}

Former McNeese State teammate and quarterback Richard Guillory reflected on Paul being co-captain of the Bills and his overall career said, “not bad for a boy from Breau Bridge.”^{xxxiii}



Endnotes:

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- ^{iv} “Buffalo Bills Sign Paul Guidry to AFL Pact,” *The Daily Advertiser*, November 28, 1965,41.
- ^v Erik Brady, “Ex-Bills Linebacker Paul Guidry Intercepted Unitas and Namath – and started Mothers,” *Buffalo News*, October 20, 2019. https://buffalonews.com/sports/bills/ex-bills-linebacker-paul-guidry-intercepted-unitas-and-namath-and-started-mothers/article_1d7e7161-aedc-5dcb-bc4f-d57600243824.html#:~:text=Ex-Bills%20linebacker%20Paul%20Guidry%20intercepted%20Unitas,and%20Namath%20%E2%80%93%20and%20started%20Mother.
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- ^{vii} “PROCLAMATION,” *Teche News*, May 5, 1966, 4.
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- ^{xii} Press and Sun-Bulletin, September 29, 1970,16. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/254780952>.
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- ^{xiv} Garth Wade, “With Saban, We Should Do Better – Bills Guidry, Green,” *Star-Gazette*, May 8, 1972,12.
- ^{xv} Garth Wade, “With Saban, We Should Do Better – Bills Guidry, Green,” *Star-Gazette*, May 8, 1972,12.
- ^{xvi} “Guidry Intercepted Passes from Unitas, Namath,” *The Tennessean*, April 6, 2007, P4.
- ^{xvii} Erik Brady, “Ex-Bills Linebacker Paul Guidry Intercepted Unitas and Namath – and started Mothers,” *Buffalo News*, October 30, 2019.
- ^{xviii} Erik Brady, “Ex-Bills Linebacker Paul Guidry Intercepted Unitas and Namath – and started Mothers,” *Buffalo News*, October 30, 2019.
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- ^{xxi} “Oilers’ Gillman Turns Table on 6 Veterans, Waives Them,” *The Kilgore News Herald*, August 14, 1974, 2.
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- ^{xxiv} Todd Tobias, “Email from the AFL – Buffalo Bills Paul Guidry.”
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