

There's no "I" in the word TEAM

A Personal Tribute to Walter Peyton

By Stephen A. Saenz, October 2000

"As I get older, I'm finding that some things I felt were important are less important. How valued are the friendships we've had and the people who have touched our lives like Walter. You take for granted that he's going to be here for a long, long time and he's not." *Mike Ditka*

I'm not one to get worked up over the passing of celebrities or sports stars but, for some reason, Walter Peyton's was different. It might be the Larry King interview I saw a few months ago. That was the first time I learned about Walter's rare liver disease and his selfless quest to make a difference in other people's lives during the final months of his own. Mind you, he didn't think he was going to die so soon. He fully expected to hang on until he could receive a liver transplant. I remember Larry asking Walter if the fact that he was a "celebrity" would enable him to receive a transplant ahead of others on the waiting list. Almost baffled, Walter replied, "Absolutely not. The fact that I am a sports figure does not and should not give me the right to receive preferential treatment."

Or maybe it was the way he acted (or didn't act) after he scored a touchdown. He wasn't one to dance around or strut his stuff on the field. He let his athletic ability speak for itself. He didn't feel the need to let other people know how special he was. He didn't crave attention or seek the limelight like many professional athletes do today.

During the past week many of his family members, friends and former teammates have praised Walter for the man he was on and off the playing field.

I was especially touched by the words shared by his brother, Eddie, during a special memorial service held at Soldier Field on Saturday. In a confident yet respectful tone, Eddie said that his brother would have wanted all of us to remember one thing:

There is no "I" in the word TEAM

Thank you, Walter, for raising the bar a few feet for those of us who are out here playing our hearts out every day!

