

Hoosier Heroes: A Tribute to George Taliaferro (1927-2018)



Here at **Homegrown Hoosier**, we are excited to announce our new “Hoosier Heroes” feature, a series of articles highlighting great people of Indiana history who made an impact. A fearless trailblazer and a leader in his community, George Taliaferro (January 8, 1927 – October 8, 2018) is the first person we want to recognize for his achievements on and off the football field.

Though Taliaferro was born in Gates, Tennessee, during his youth he and his family moved to Gary, Indiana, where he graduated from Gary Roosevelt High School in 1945. Taliaferro played football for Indiana University in Bloomington from 1945 to 1948, holding a variety of positions on the team, including halfback, quarterback, defensive back, and kicker. Going to college at IU in the mid-forties, Taliaferro dealt with prejudice, including being barred from living in the student dormitories and being treated unequally by some of his fellow teammates. Despite this, Taliaferro became a member of Kappa Alpha Psi university, and was a leading rusher and three-time All-American on his football team. He led the team to its historic Big Ten championship during his rookie year in 1945, IU football’s only undefeated season.

Though Taliaferro was a star athlete at IU, he was not allowed entry into the popular Gables Restaurant in Bloomington. Legendary IU president Herman B. Wells intervened, telling the owner that he would have the restaurant closed to students if they continued to deny entry to

Taliaferro. This was a key moment in the desegregation of the school and the Indiana community.

Taliaferro played for Indiana University two years before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball. For his achievements as a player and his groundbreaking fearlessness, he was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1981.

Taliaferro made history a second time when he became the first African-American player to be drafted by a NFL team. During the 1950s, he went on to play for the New York Yanks, the Dallas Texans, the Baltimore Colts, and the Philadelphia Eagles.

Taliaferro also deserves to be remembered for his accomplishments off the field. In later years, he volunteered with Big Brothers Big Sisters, a program in which adults mentor youth, and brought the organization to Bloomington. Taliaferro also advised former prisoners on how to adjust back to life in society after being incarcerated. He received a Master's degree in social work from Howard University, taught at Maryland, and was a dean of students at Morgan State. In Bloomington, he founded the Neil-Marshall Alumni Club, a group for African-American IU alumni.

George Taliaferro deserves to be recognized and celebrated as one of the heroes of Hoosier history. His legacy is honored with a statue on display outside of the Memorial Stadium at IU.

