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Buccaneers embrace McKay legacy

By Pat Yasinskas

TAMPA, Fla. -- As ceremonial press conferences go, what I just saw was as good as it gets.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers officially announced former coach John McKay will be the next inductee into the team's Ring of Honor. For a franchise that has a history of not always doing things the right way, this one was spectacularly graceful.

Some of that might have been because of the subject matter and the people involved. Start with Lee Roy Selmon, the first member of the Ring of Honor.

"I really believe [McKay] should have been in last year," Selmon said.

Buccaneer history might not always be pretty, but Selmon is Mr. Buccaneer and he and McKay, who passed away in 2001, are the only two people who could have brought together the collection of folks who showed up at One Buccaneer Place on Wednesday.

At the end of his coaching tenure, Tampa Bay fans were screaming, "Throw McKay in Tampa Bay", but it became obvious Wednesday the man built a pretty impressive bridge across areas where there were some choppy waters.

That brings us to the next speaker. It was **Rich McKay**, the coach's son. Rich was the general manager of the Buccaneers in the 1990s and, along with coach Tony Dungy, turned the franchise from hapless to respectable and helped bring a new stadium.

A few years later, **Rich McKay** lost a power struggle with coach Jon Gruden. He ended up going to the Atlanta Falcons where he's now the team president.

Prior to Wednesday, Rich McKay never had been in the new One Buccaneer Place. For those who haven't seen it, it's a palace under any circumstances and light years from the team's initial facility. With current general manager Mark Dominik standing against a wall, co-chairman Bryan Glazer introduced Rich McKay as "our friend."

Yes, the president of the Atlanta Falcons is a friend of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. **Rich McKay** walked onto stage carrying a fedora Tampa Bay hat like his dad used to wear, and talked all about the early years of the Buccaneers. There was no hint at bitterness about his own departure, just glowing terms about his father, who Rich repeatedly referred to as "the coach."

Rich McKay, who came into Tampa's **Jesuit High School** as a senior and grabbed the starting quarterback job away from would-have-been legend Jeff Bender, talked about the Bucs winning their first game on Dec. 11, 1977, and how a crowd showed up at the airport. He talked extensively about the 1979 season in which the Buccaneers went to the NFC Championship Game.

With former John McKay assistant Wayne Fontes, McKay's daughter Terri and legendary Tampa restaurant owner and family friend Malio Iavarone sitting in the front row, **Rich McKay** said that season might have been the most gratifying of any for his father, who built a dynasty at the University of Southern California.

"I can assure you he was as proud or prouder of the '79 team than any national championship team," Rich McKay said.

The Bucs officially will induct John McKay into the Ring of Honor Dec. 5. They'll wear their 1976 throwback uniforms for that game. It will be against the Atlanta Falcons. A perfect fit for the McKay family and the McKay legacy.



John McKay coached the Bucs from 1976 to 1984.