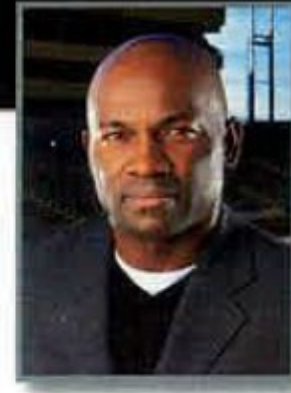


# Terance Mathis



Few people knew the ugly underside of defeat like Terance Mathis – he was part of the University of New Mexico football program when it hit low tide in the late 1980s.

But no one hated losing more – and almost no Lobo has ever risen above the wrong side of a scoreboard like the best receiver in UNM history.

Mathis, 42, went from virtually unrecruited high school senior to a Pro Bowl player in his career, using hard work and an indomitable spirit as his fuel and fire.

"Perseverance, work ethic, an attitude of not being defeated," Mathis says of the inner drive that led him from the Atlanta suburbs to Albuquerque and back to Atlanta as a member of the Atlanta Falcons, where he played for most of his 13-year NFL career.

For most of his time at UNM, Mathis was listed at 5-foot-9, 165 pounds, though he could have easily passed for 155. Size and speed didn't define him. A hard head and quick feet did. Utilizing a wizard's ability to stop, go, stop and then go again, he was the staple of the Lobos' pass-oriented attack under coaches Joe Lee Dunn and Mike Sheppard. By the time he left UNM in 1989, he held NCAA records for career catches (263) and receiving yards (4,254).

His final game as a Lobo, a shocking win over Fresno State, still stands as a golden moment in Lobo football. It was the day Mathis set his NCAA records, solidified his spot as UNM's only consensus All-America, and for a moment banished the shadows left by the program's many defeats during his time in Albuquerque.

"I was having a good time, having fun, trying to help the football team win," he says simply.

Mathis' kind of help didn't impress the NFL, at least not at first. He was drafted by the New York Jets in the sixth round, and while he stuck with the team, he never was utilized to his full effectiveness until he joined the Falcons.

There, Mathis excelled. He helped Atlanta to the Super Bowl in 1994, catching 111 passes. For his career, he finished with 889 receptions, 6,809 yards and 63 touchdowns.

Mathis, who runs a workout facility in Atlanta and is the father of two children, ages 6 to 20, says he doesn't often dwell on his career. But when the call from the Albuquerque/New Mexico Sports Hall of Fame came late last fall, he said some of the passion returned – the same white-hot feelings he had as he tried in vain to lead the Lobos out of the darkness.

"Seven years removed from football, I thought I was done with honors; that was in the past," he says. "When they told me, I was, 'Oh, really?' I was excited. My wife and kids were excited.

"But I have to say," he adds, "that while football was what I did, it's not who I am."

Who is Terance Mathis? A pretty independent fellow, for sure. A former football player whose heart was bigger than his helmet. And, finally, a guy who knows that some losses are only temporary.