

# Monk: Character Matters

## An Open Letter to the Hall of Fame Voters

The Pro Football Hall of Fame's mission statement reads:

- To honor individuals who have made outstanding contributions to professional football
- To preserve professional football's historic documents and artifacts
- To educate the public regarding the origin, development and growth of professional football as an important part of American culture
- **To promote the positive values of the sport**

Very few professional players promoted “the positive values of the sport” *through their play* more powerfully than Art Monk. And in an age when the sport has been disgraced by scandals from its biggest stars and inundated with horrific excuses for role models, the NFL and all institutions that represent it should be lining up to embrace, promote and honor the type of example that Art Monk personified throughout his career.

I understand off-the-field issues, good *or* bad, are not to be taken into consideration when considering a Hall of Fame candidate, so I'm not suggesting that Art's many charities, his football camp, or his continued community outreaches be considered when deciding whether or not he belongs in the Hall. I'm talking about the incredible example of character the man set *on the field, as a football player*, and that *must* be taken into account when considering his candidacy. Otherwise, the very mission statement that the Hall was built on is being ignored and disrespected.

When Monk was again denied induction in 2007, threads were started on Web message boards asking fans to address Art and tell him what he meant to them, with the intention of passing the messages on to Art himself. A bit melodramatic? Only to the most jaded and cynical among us. Because what you'll see in these selections (sampled below) is evidence of *why* the case for Art Monk engenders such passion year in and year out, *why* voters are swamped with emails, *why* people take time out of their lives to make this a personal cause. It's not just because Art Monk set records and helped the Redskins win games. It's because his play on the field actually *affected people's lives in a positive manner*. It's because those who watched him want desperately to see that type of rare, selfless, spotlight-shunning example of excellence rewarded, as it so rarely seems to be in sports and in everyday life.

Monk didn't gloat after a score; he casually tossed the ball back to the referee in his trademark fashion. Monk didn't demand to be the featured receiver; he gladly fostered and sincerely celebrated the success of his teammates. Monk didn't think making a first

down was worthy of evangelical genuflecting; Nearly 75 percent of the passes he received went for first downs, and 0 percent came with a showboating gesture. Monk didn't take plays off when he wasn't getting the ball, particularly running plays; he became known as one of the best blocking receivers the game has ever seen.

In short, Monk helped shape the way *thousands of young people view the game of football and how it should be played*: the importance of teamwork, leadership, selflessness, humility in victory and grace in defeat. He helped illustrate the amazing lessons at the heart of football that make the game so great, lessons so applicable to success in life as well as on a gridiron. What an incredible service this is to a game whose honor the Hall of Fame was built to protect and uphold. Combine that service with the stats, the all-time records and the championships, and Monk's case for induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame is stunningly overwhelming.

That's why the comments below, which attest to the enduring effect of Monk's example, are included on this page: to remind decision-makers that sometimes, as dictated by the Hall's very mission, there is more that must be taken into consideration when evaluating a player's worth than cold, hard stats. Monk set three all-time statistical records before he left the game, but the game changes, athletes improve, and records are broken. It's the example of character Monk set on the field for 15 years that endures, that is timeless, and that, combined with his stellar stats, should finally ensure that the name "Art Monk" *also* endures, forever honored as an elite contributor to the world's greatest game in the institution that claims to represent that game's greatest qualities.

The following quotes from fans represent a small sampling taken from threads that can be found at these links: <http://hailredskins.com/vbforum/showthread.php?t=39675> and <http://www.extremeskins.com/forums/showthread.php?t=189656&page=1&pp=15>. They powerfully illustrate the legacy Monk left to the game of football, the enduring power of which statistical discussions alone cannot begin to describe, and which very few professional athletes in *any* sport can claim to equal.

- I am a teacher who had the privilege of watching your entire career. I work in an inner city school, and character education is a part of the curriculum I teach. When my students ask me to cite examples of people who exemplify the kind of character that I admire, I give them examples from my own life, my mom; from history, and one man from the world of sports, Art Monk. Thank you for your positive example. I wish that we lived in a world where accomplishment only mattered when it was coupled with character. I want the young men and women I teach to see that the NFL and its Hall of Fame valued your contributions the way those of us who saw you play do. In a world full of bad examples, you are a good example, I am deeply grateful. I know it is not much, but I hope you get the recognition that I feel you should have had seven years ago.
- My Grandfather's favorite player was you, he couldn't get enough or say enough good things about you. He would point to you as an example to the rest of us as the right way to carry oneself in the world.

- You have always been an inspiration to me , the example of how a man should live his life among others, to lead by example and do it with humility and dignity.
- I grew up in England watching you play in the 1980's. You were an inspiration because you showed class, character and skill. Above all this, everything I saw and read about you said you were a great person.
- You showed us all how the game is supposed to be played and I wish more WR's in this league today could follow your example. Someday when I coach my kids, I will cite you as an example of how the game should be played.
- I try to carry myself the way you did on the field: Work to be the best, and let your performance speak for itself.
- You personify everything that makes sports great. I own only 1 sports jersey. It's yours.
- My 5 year old will be shown YOUR highlights and told about YOUR accomplishments as an example of how sports are to be played, no matter what sport he decides to play.
- My Dad and I watched you together during your career, and I tried to play hockey and baseball the way Art Monk played football.
- As a kid, I admired you. I wanted to be just like you when I played football, I wore number 81 because of you and you played the game just like it should be played you never ran your mouth you let your play do the talking.
- My father pulled me aside one day while watching a game and told me something that I've never forgotten: "Son, if you grow up with half the qualities that Art Monk has, you'll be a great man." As a kid, I didn't really understand what he was driving at. I do now.
- I have two young sons, and they will know who Art Monk is. When someone scores and draws attention to themselves in some manner, I always mention that they are not and will never be as great as Art Monk, who just simply handed the ball back to the Ref. I always state that in today's game we have very few players that put the team first, and that is a shame.
- I would like to thank you for many years of great football. More importantly, I would like to thank you for the dignified, humble manner in which you comported yourself both on and off the field. It is quite obvious to all of us Redskins fans that you are most deserving of HOF status and you certainly maintain that status in our minds.

- You made quite an impression on [my son]. I'm so glad that he had an athlete of your caliber to look up to when he was growing up.
- When I was younger I used to tell my dad I wanted to be just like Art Monk. And you know I still feel the same way.
- You were my favorite player when I first started watching football, and your humbleness and quiet professionalism have been examples for me in my own life.
- Thanks for all of the great memories from my childhood. You were, and to me, still are, symbolic of all that is right in sports.
- Thank you for showing us all the type of person an NFL player should be. Thank you for being the type of person we all aspire to be.
- As I was growing up, I never "idolized" athletes. Being in a sports oriented family, I learned how they were people just like I was. But there was one person that I felt differently toward and that was James Arthur Monk. I never felt that Art got his due as a player but I always knew that didn't matter because he would get his due in Canton.
- The NFL should want their players to strive to be more like you. The NFL should show footage of you in their rookie symposium. It's ok to just give the ref the ball when you score. It's ok to hustle back to the huddle after gaining a first down rather than dancing for 6 seconds while signaling first down as if you were filling in for the referee also.
- Your example is something to which I have always strived. I may not be a football player, but your attitude and actions can be easily taken into the real world and the workplace. I have tried to always give my best, even if I am not the one getting the accolades or the glory.
- To leave Art Monk out of the hall is sending a message to every kid playing sports that it is better to play for personal glory than for the betterment of the team.
- It was important growing up to have heroes to look up to, to watch, and to see succeed. I was never disappointed - You always delivered.
- You were the perfect football player, the perfect role model.
- I don't know if the Hall even matters to you, but we are devastated year after year on your behalf. Thank you for setting a good example for the rest of us.
- It's hard to express all that a childhood hero means, but you were larger than life to my sister and I. One thing I truly appreciate is that you never did anything to

tarnish your image in the eyes of your smallest fans. As I've grown up, I grew to admire your personal qualities - such as your dependability, your humility, and your quiet dignity - even more than your accomplishments on the field. As far as I'm concerned, you are one of a kind!

- Thanks for being such a great role model to the youth of today. It's a shame we didn't appreciate what a first class person you were earlier on. Now, inundated with prima dona's and massive egos we can fully appreciate your Hall of Fame credentials.
- For literally as long as I've lived, I've either watched your final games live or seen dozens of others on tape and heard stories of you whenever my father would mention the word "sportsmanship." Thank you, Art, for more than you'll ever know.
- My dad was sure to point out during Skins games Darrell Green and yourself as the kind of athletes I should look up to. True role models like you seem to be getting more and more rare as time goes on.
- I want to thank you for how you played the game. In an era where style overcame substance in the NFL, you went out there and just did your job. My favorite thing about watching you score all those touchdowns was how you just tossed the ball to the referee; a class act that is practically extinct in today's game.
- I grew up as a Redskins fan in the 80's, during that time I was able to follow your career and what I was able to see was a man that carried himself with class and just did his job.
- When I talked to my kids about how I wanted them to act, especially in sports, I told them about you.
- I wanted to imitate all of the great things you did on the football field, and I wanted to mirror your great character and all of the things you and your teammates did for the community. You were, and still are, a great role model for me and many other kids that grew up during that time. The way you approached both life and football with such a work ethic and dignity made me want to do the same in my life.
- In an age where players make unimaginable sums of money and seem to care less and less about the team, I find myself caring less and less about pro sports. This is mostly because there are not enough Art Monks in the game today.
- Your work on and off the football field is completely true to your name: a work of Art. And to forget about your impact on football is like forgetting about the Mona Lisa.

- Players like you are why the HOF was built.

For streaming video resources relating to Art Monk's candidacy for Hall of Fame enshrinement, please visit [www.monk4thehall.com](http://www.monk4thehall.com).

Thanks for your time, and feel free to e-mail me with any comments at [tkerch@verizon.net](mailto:tkerch@verizon.net).