Rewind to ’85

Trio of lawyers producing documentary on Bears team that won Super Bowl XX

BY JACK SILVERSTEIN
Law Bulletin staff writer

On Jan. 27, 1986, the day after the Chicago Bears demolished the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XX, an estimated 500,000 people showed up for the victory parade on LaSalle Street, followed by a rally at Daley Plaza.

Here’s who wasn’t there:

Walter Payton, Jim McMahon, Jay Hilgenberg, Jimbo C overt, Richard Dent, Dan Hampton, Mike Singletary, Otis Wilson and Dave Duerson.

That’s because players selected for the following week’s Pro Bowl — like those nine — were required to report to Hawaii the day after the Super Bowl.

“When you win the Super Bowl, the very next day … the players go to the Pro Bowl,” said Wilson, one of the team’s three starting linebackers. “A lot of guys really didn’t share in that (celebratory) experience.”

Because of that, Wilson said, despite 29 years of accolades, headlines, books, commercials, reunions, interviews and general mythologizing, “There really hasn’t been anything done on a high level to celebrate this team — I mean, citywide. It’s overdue.”

A trio of Chicago lawyers feel the same way.

Richard W. Lenkov, Scott G. Prestin and Joseph G. Klest are joining Wilson to produce “’85: The Untold Story of the Greatest Team in Pro Football History,” a film they are billing as the first feature-length documentary about the iconic team.

They plan to release it this fall to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the season. Today is the 29th anniversary of Super Bowl XX.

Wilson needed no convincing.

Wilson needed no convincing. He joined Lenkov and Prestin as one of the film’s producers along with Klest of Klest Injury Law Firm and film producer Tom Pellegrini, whose credits include the 2011 documentary “Jiro Dreams of Sushi.”

Prestin has 15 years of production experience and is working on a documentary about the trial of serial killer John Wayne Gacy, which he is co-producing with Klest.

Prestin also has the fandom credentials, having grown up cheering for the Bears in Libertyville, where he watched them beat New England, 46-10, in Super Bowl XX.

“I remember watching the game with my friends, and then we went outside at halftime and played football in the snow,” Prestin said.

Lenkov has a different story. He grew up in Montreal rooting for the Canadiens, Expos and, originally, the Houston Oilers because of running back Earl Campbell.

“Being a huge sports fan, but not someone who grew up here, I don’t have Chicago sports in my DNA,” Lenkov said. “But the Chicago Bears were the one team I adopted.”

That happened because the team appeared regularly on Canadian TV. Lenkov and his father became fans together.

“That was something we shared,” Lenkov said. “That game was as huge in Canada as it was anywhere.”

So how did a Canadian, Earl Campbell-rooting attorney convince the self-proclaimed “Mama’s Boy Otis” to lead the first feature-length documentary of arguably the greatest NFL team of all-time?

“God’s honest truth?” Wilson said. “Ain’t nobody been doing nothing.”

There has, of course, been plenty of attention shined on that team over the past three decades.

oral history of “The Super Bowl Shuffle.”

There have also been countless stories about players from that team — including NFL Network’s “A Football Life” documentary about Payton — each of which touches on the season from a single perspective.

But has the team been adequately celebrated?

“In certain ways, I’d say yes, because they are legendary,” said Chicago Sun-Times columnist Rick Telander, who was interviewed for the film. “On the other hand, for as extraordinary a bit of Chicago history it actually encompasses, maybe you can’t celebrate it enough.”

Along with Wilson, the filmmakers have interviewed Dan Hampton and Steve McMichael with “seven or eight” other members of the team in the works; Lenkov said, including Ditka, McMahon, Dent, Gary Fencik, Willie Gault and Keith Van Horne.

The group is also talking to opposing players and coaches from the 1985 season.

Joe Theismann — former quarterback of the Washington Redskins, who the Bears beat 45-10 in 1985 — is committed, Lenkov said. The filmmakers are in talks with Lawrence Taylor — whose New York Giants lost to the Bears in the playoffs, 21-0 — and with Dan Marino and coach Don Shula of the Miami Dolphins, the only team to beat the Bears that season.

Along with Telander, other interviews already done feature Jesse Jackson, Michael Wilson and Bill Kurtis.

“When you make a film, it’s a huge undertaking, far more complex than anybody realizes,” Telander said. “Setting up the interviews, the cameras, the sound, the lights, the writing and then (getting) the rights might be the hardest part of all. Who better than a lawyer?”

In talks to narrate the film is Chicagoan Jim Belushi.

“He was on the sideline the whole time,” Wilson said. “It’d be perfect to have him a part of it.”

As the 1985 season rolled on and the wins piled up, Wilson knew he was part of something special. He recalls celebrating on Rush Street with teammates following the win over the Giants that sent the Bears to the NFC championship game.

“That was the greatest experience, seeing the fans going berserk,” he said. “We just partied with them. And after we had enough, police escorted us out of there, and we went to the next spot.”

Lenkov knew the team had reached — it found him in Canada. Wilson knew when it found him in New York after the Super Bowl during an endorsement trip. Dent traveled there with him, and the two called the aforementioned Taylor — the Hall of Fame linebacker — to hang out on Park Avenue.

“A kid was walking with his parents and said, ‘Ma, that’s one of the guys that was in the Super Bowl Shuffle!’” Wilson said.

“Didn’t even say ‘That was two guys who won the Super Bowl!’ ‘That’s the guy who was in the Super Bowl Shuffle!’ … We captured everybody.”

Wilson and the filmmakers are hyping the documentary as the “definitive, untold story,” with a focus exclusively on events from the 1985 season.

The film will not explore stories about painkiller abuse or the physical toll the game took on players such as Dent, McMahon, William Perry and the late Duerson, who fatally shot himself in the chest in 2011 and left a note in which he requested his brain be studied due to concerns about concussions he suffered.

“They are all really interesting issues and ones that are relevant now,” Lenkov said. “But honestly, our focus is not on that. It’s on that year.”

The filmmakers are planning a theatrical screening in the fall and are exploring streaming options with Netflix, Amazon and HBO.

Lenkov, Prestin and Klest are open to others getting involved; those interested can e-mail Lenkov at rlenkov@85bearsdoc.com.

“I’m just excited that the story’s going to be told,” Wilson said. “It’s a fun story. Of course everybody knows what happened and how it unfolded, but the behind-the-scenes things — the stories the guys can tell that wasn’t told — that should add to it.”

To which he added: “We’re gonna party again.”