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A former New York fan has a dramatic change of heart

By Tom Kirvan

Located in the North Shore neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Acrisure Stadium serves as the home for the NFL's Pittsburgh Steelers and the University of Pittsburgh Panthers football team.

As a kid growing up in Westchester County, N.Y., Jeff Rosenthal admitted to being a “rebel” who gave his parents pause.

But unlike the teen character portrayed by James Dean in a 1955 movie classic, Rosenthal had a “cause” – which quite simply was to torment all the New York Giants fans in his family.

“I grew up near Peekskill, the training camp for the New York Jets and they had this rebel quarterback named Joe Willie Namath,” Rosenthal recalled. “Being a rebellious teenager in a family of Giants fans, I became a Jets fan. When the Jets won the Super Bowl in January 1969 in a massive upset that Joe Namath predicted, I was jumping all over the Giants fans in the family.”

Now a partner with the New Jersey law firm of Mandelbaum Barrett PC, Rosenthal has long since left his allegiance to the Jets behind, principally due to his decision to attend college at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) in that eventful year of 1969 when man walked on the moon and Woodstock signified a pivotal moment in the counterculture movement.

Back then, Rosenthal didn’t exactly fit the look of a future lawyer. He sported a mop of curly hair that resembled an afro, long sideburns, a beard, braces, and a decidedly disheveled appearance often topped off by a “Keep on Truckin” T-shirt. He enrolled at Pitt after skating through high school.

“I was the typical disruptive ADHD child,” Rosenthal said in matter-of-fact fashion. “I was the class clown who got through high school only because I’m a really good test-taker.”

When Rosenthal began his studies at Pitt, which has a reputation for regularly producing Fulbright Scholars, the school’s



Jeffrey M. Rosenthal
Partner
Mandelbaum Barrett PC



Decked out in their Steelers garb, Rosenthal and his wife, Susan, were all smiles at an NFL team event hosted by Hollywood Golf Club in New Jersey.

football program was struggling, offering little in the way of excitement for diehard Panther fans.

“Football games at Pitt were only good to provide a venue for outdoor drinking since the team was really bad, although they were better than the Steelers who were 1-13,” Rosenthal said with a laugh.

With two sad-sack teams in the Steel City, Rosenthal was slow to embrace the football culture of Pittsburgh until 1972 when the Steelers made their first of eight straight playoff appearances thanks to a team led by quarterback Terry Bradshaw, running back Franco Harris, and defensive lineman “Mean” Joe Greene.

Coached by Chuck Noll, the 1972 team was about to become the legendary “Steel Curtain” dynasty that produced four Super Bowl titles over a six-year period.

The resurgence wasn’t confined to just the Steelers, however, as Pitt suddenly became the talk of the town under new coach Johnny Majors, who turned around

the fortunes of the Panthers during his reign from 1972-76.

“He recruited a fellow named Tony Dorsett, who won the Heisman Trophy his senior season while leading Pitt to an undefeated season and the national title,” Rosenthal said of the magical 1976 year. “In many respects, it was the golden era of football in Pittsburgh.”

Which gave Rosenthal all the more reason to pursue a Master of Business Administration at Pitt after earning his bachelor’s degree from there in 1973, while also admitting that he had an even more compelling reason to stick around the city where three major rivers converge.

Love.

“I spent eight years in Pittsburgh, married a cute girl from Pittsburgh, and was a (Steelers) season ticket holder by 1974,” Rosenthal related. “I have been a diehard Steelers fan ever since and they have saved my kids, grandkids, and me from a life of misery as a Jets fan.”

His college romance, which would blossom into a marriage that is now in its 51st year, began near the end of his sophomore year when he “stumbled” into the library to take a nap after drinking heavily at a nearby campus bar. A studious pharmacy student by the name of Susan caught his eye, and after briefly being introduced to her by a mutual friend, Rosenthal was determined to ask her out on a date. She rebuffed his initial request, but over the next several days he continued to return to the library to talk with her in hopes of changing her mind. On his fourth try, she relented.

“And the rest, as they say, is history,” said Rosenthal with a broad smile.

The couple has two children, both of whom are lawyers. Their son, Paul, is a litigator and partner at Faegre Drinker in New Jersey, while their daughter, Erica, is deputy general counsel for Orrick in New York.

“Both of them have done very well. I’m very proud of them,” said Rosenthal, who

has five grandchildren. “When the three of us start to talk about legal stuff, people just leave the table. I don’t understand it.”

When the talk shifts to football, however, everyone in the family is at rapt attention, according to Rosenthal.

“We all live and die with the Steelers,” Rosenthal proclaimed. “Everyone knows that whenever the Steelers are playing, don’t even bother to call me. I’m not gonna talk to you. I’m focused on the game.”

To such a degree that his wife blocks out game days on her calendar and the only interruptions Rosenthal permits are from Steelers buddies on a text thread as they commiserate or celebrate about the inevitable ups and downs of the game.

“That’s the only distraction I allow during the game,” Rosenthal said adamantly. “We ramble on throughout the game, offering such comments as ‘Oh my God, did you see that call? What an awful call was that.’ It’s like we don’t even have to finish the thought because we all know what we’re saying and thinking.

“There is an understanding that if you live in Pittsburgh for more than a couple of years, you have to be a Steelers fan,” Rosenthal remarked. “They are the soul of the city and as the team goes, so goes the mood of the city.”

Early in the 2025 season, Rosenthal – being the good father and grandfather that he is – issued an invitation to everyone in his immediate family to join him for the Steelers-Jets game at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J.

“I told them that I was treating,” said Rosenthal of the invitation, which suddenly became especially appealing since he was picking up the tab.

“We all showed up in Steelers T-shirts and hats and everything else. And I brought a bunch of Terrible Towels for us to wave,” he said of the black and gold rally towels that have come to symbolize the team’s tough, gritty reputation. “The usher standing next to me was this very nice woman who’s probably been there for 10 to 12 years. She said, ‘Wow, there sure are a lot of Steelers fans here today.’

“I looked at her and said, ‘That’s because every Steelers game is a home game.’ She got a kick out of that.”



Voicing their support for the Steelers during their 34-32 win over the New York Jets at MetLife Stadium on September 7, 2025 were (l-r) Rosenthal and Susan with daughter Erica, daughter-in-law Catherine, son Paul, and granddaughter Annie.

