

NFL Hall-of-Famer Kellen Winslow Sr. will be keynote speaker for NAACP Freedom Fund banquet

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
April 9 2018 10:44 AM





BELLEVILLE - Kellen Winslow Sr. is recognized by many as one of the greatest tight ends to ever play in the NFL.

Winslow, an East St. Louis native, was enshrined in the NFL Hall of Fame in 1995. He played his entire career with the San Diego Chargers from 1979 to 1987 and was an All-American at the University of Missouri.

Winslow will be the keynote speaker for the upcoming 50th Anniversary Alton NAACP Freedom Fund banquet. The banquet is at 6 p.m. Saturday, May 5, at the Best Western Premier, the former Holiday Inn, at 3800 Homer Adams Parkway in Alton. Today, he resides back home in Belleville. The banquet is used for the NAACP's Back to School /Stay in School, Christmas Shopping Spree and scholarships for students for college.

In his early high school years, Winslow was probably the least likely person to become a Hall of Fame inductee as his only claim to fame was he was a "chess" player at East St. Louis. He was noticed by a coach and convinced to join the East St. Louis football team and with his natural athleticism, quickly became a star and was recruited by Missouri to play football, then drafted in the first round of the 1979 draft by the Chargers. A knee injury ended his career in 1987.

Winslow said he is proud that many still remember his football exploits, but he remains humble to this day.

"There were a lot of NFL tight ends probably more athletic than I was," Winslow said. "John Mackey, Charlie Sanders, and Jackie Smith would have done the same things in the league if they had played in the system with coach Don Coryell. I got to be the last piece of the puzzle in the offense. We had Joe Gibbs, Coryell, and Jim Hanifan as coaches. We also had John Jefferson, Charlie Joyner and Chuck Muncie on that team."

Winslow said Coach Perry and Coach Lewis talked him into coming out for the Flyers' team at the end of his junior year.

He said his experience there as a senior and time at Missouri set him up for the NFL. Now at home, Winslow said his family has always treated him the same, even when he was a star in the NFL and all of them remain close.

He said his time in the NFL changed his entire life. His family traveled to many of his games while he was at Missouri and also in the NFL.

"I still remember my family getting in the car driving to Memphis my senior year in college and they kept that tradition when I was in the NFL," he said.

Winslow said he hopes his work in the NFL still inspires young people.

"You have different impacts on people and you have to take care of your family and live the way you are supposed to live and a way you want to be treated," he said. "I do a lot of higher education consulting and try to give people the benefit of my experiences and things I went through and be emphatic with young people.

"My mother calls what happened to me a 'Hollywood story.' When I go back to Canton and the NFL Hall of Fame, it reminds me of almost out of body experiences in the NFL when I see myself with Otto Graham, Gale Sayers, Roger Staubach and Bart Starr. I say to myself, 'why me?'"

Winslow said he is proud to speak on the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination and likewise the 50th anniversary of the Alton Branch of the NAACP organization.

He said it is also always nice to be remembered and he just hopes to use the platform to convey a message to people that we have to continue to evolve as people. He said we as a population in America are still dealing with issues that should have been dealt with 100 years ago in regard to race and humanity in this country.

"Oppression takes up time and money," he said. "How can a society grow and flourish with that?"

"Dr. King worked to tear down the walls of oppression and ability to go to any university in this country that was not based on the color of your skin, but the ability to work with the dignity as a human being. I think those alive when Dr. King was shot remembered where they were. I was in fourth grade and at the time I lived in a very

sheltered and supportive life in East St. Louis. Everything Dr. King wrote is still relevant today. We need to work on what is going on in this country and be realistic; there is still a lot of work to be done.”

Today, Kellen Winslow Sr. has a consulting business. He was the former director of athletics at Florida A & M University. He was also vice president for athletics and wellness at Lakeland College, Wisconsin. Winslow is most known in the NFL as part of “Air Coryell” with Don Coryell and the San Diego Chargers. He totaled 1,000 yards in receiving three consecutive years. He also finished with 1,290 yards receiving in 1980 and that record stood until Rob Gronowski totaled 1,327 in 2011.

In the Chargers’ playoff game against Miami, he caught 13 passes for 166 yards and a touchdown and sent the game into overtime. That record stood for 30 years until Vernon Davis caught passes for 180 yards in 2012. He played in five Pro Bowls during his career.

NAACP President Andy Hightower invited Winslow to be the keynote speaker this year and Kellen Winslow said the Hightower name means something around the Metro East and much beyond. He joked and said, “there is a Hightower on every corner around here” and recognized what that family has meant to the region.

Alton Branch of the NAACP President Andy Hightower said Winslow will be an inspiration to everyone in attendance this year and he is honored to have the football legend come and speak.

“Our theme this year is “After 50 Years the Journey Continues and Let’s Do More,” he said. “It’s ironic that the Alton NAACP anniversary coincides with the 50-year anniversary of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. assassination. Ticket sales are going well and we have extended the deadline for purchasing advertisements in our souvenir journal.”

Anyone interested in purchasing tickets or a spot in the souvenir program should call Maxine Caldwell, chairperson at (618) 795-5786, Hightower at (618) 465-1621 or Anita Banks, co-chairperson at (618) 465-8366.